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COMIC HEROES
#23
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THE BATMAN

COMIC HEROES

INSIDE!

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FROM THE MAKERS OF SFX MAGAZINE

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Some public domain characters who as yet haven't inspired superheroes or villains (but we think they should):
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The Cheshire Cat
King Canute
Sterquilinus, the Roman God of Manure

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Hera, give me strength!

You can't beat a good bit of planet-exploding action, and this art by Clayton Crain for the "Chromium" wraparound cover for this June's *X-O Manowar* #26 certainly features a good bit of planet-exploding action.

Image © Valiant 2014

Marvel assures us – and we quote – "Yes that is interior art!" It's by Mike Del Mundo taken from *Elektra* #1.

Image © Marvel

A creepy spread from INJ Culbard's *Celeste* (SelfMadeHero, out now). Learn more on page 112.

Image © 2014 INJ Culbard

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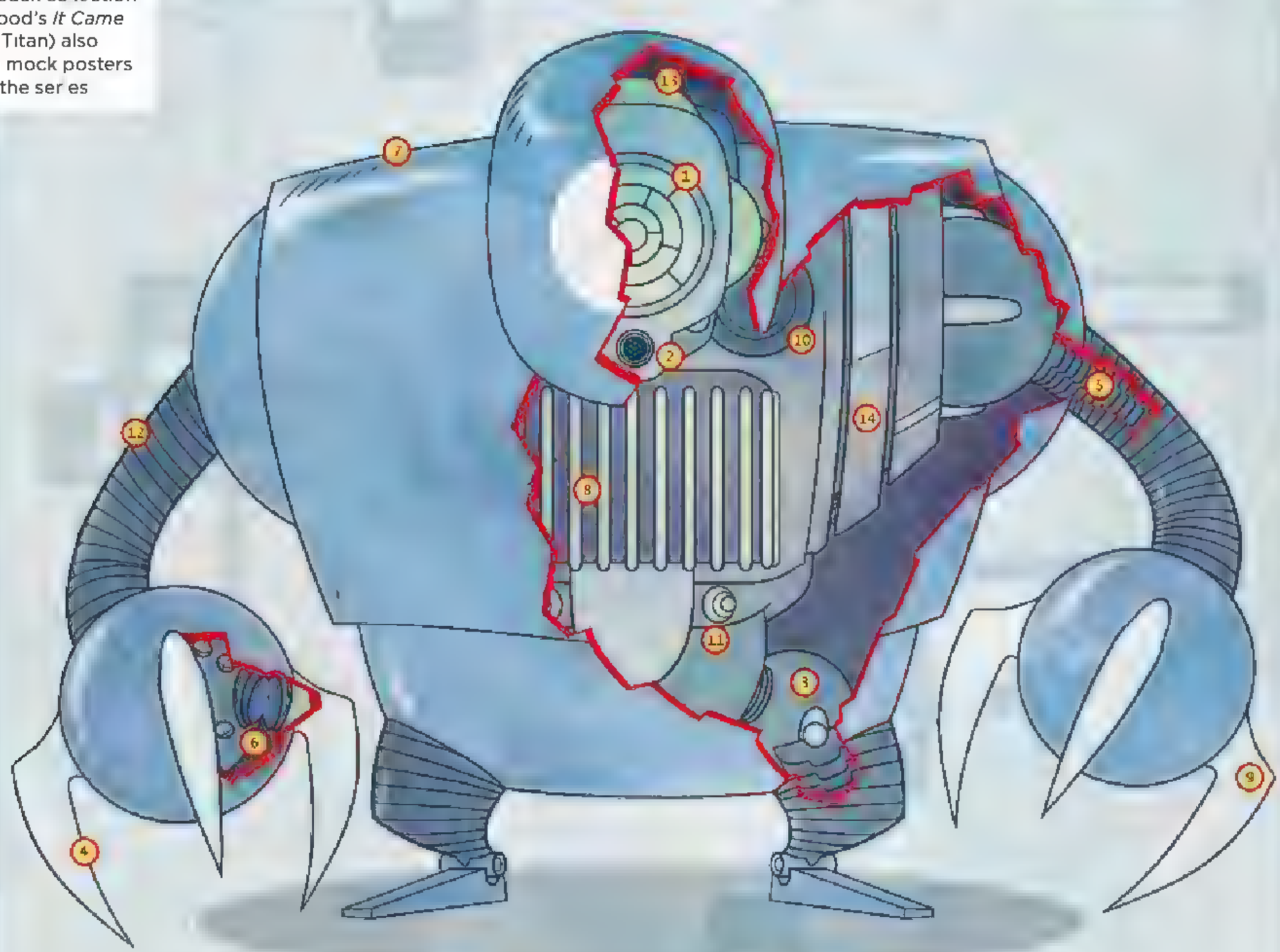
"IT'S LIKE A SINKING FEELING..."

Anatomy of a Grurk

Aside from the excellent strip itself, the hardback collection of Dan Boultwood's *It Came* (out now from Titan) also features all the mock posters he created for the series



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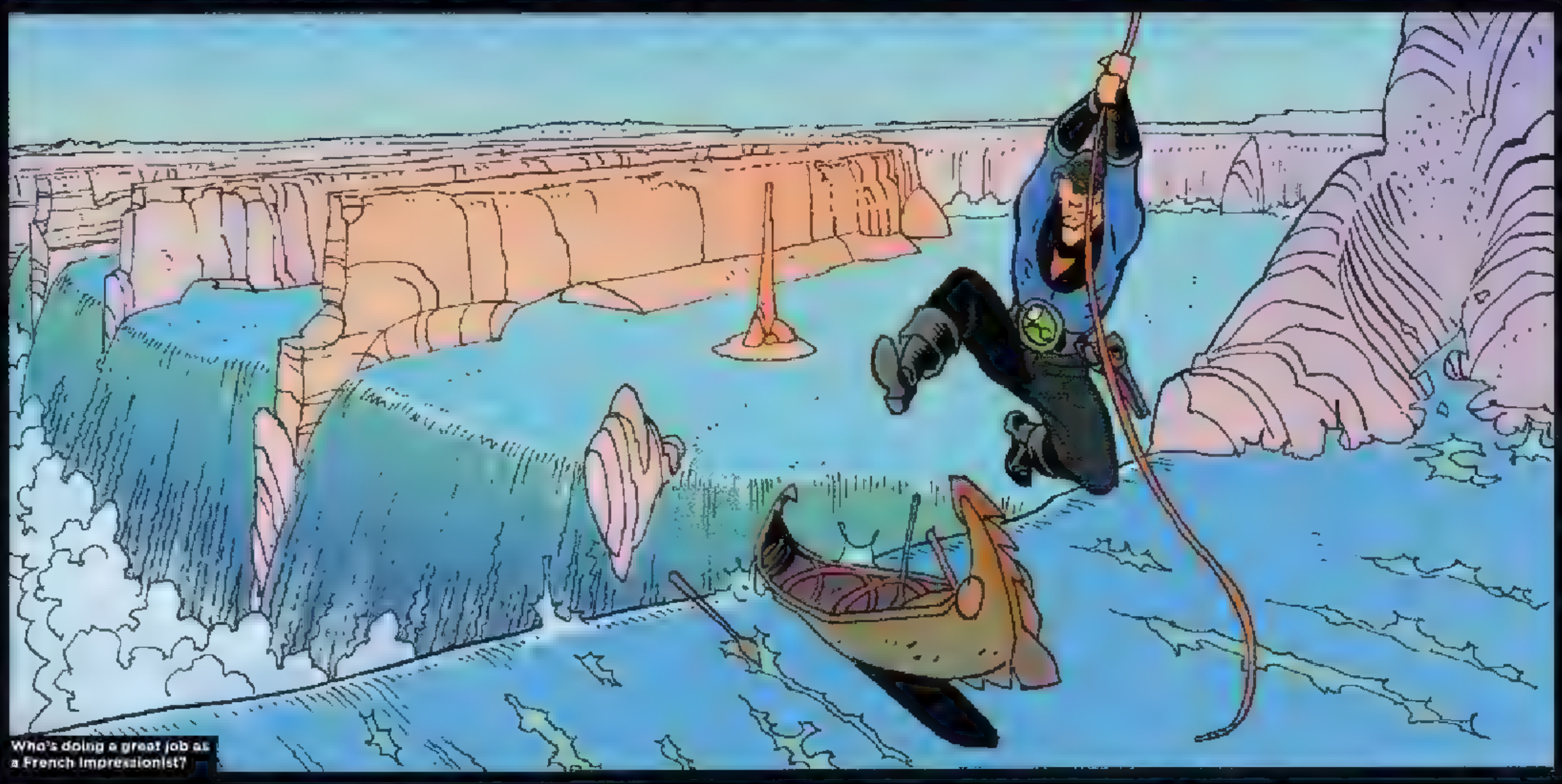
PANEL GAMES

A misguided tour of the past few months in comic books...



Who's doing a great job as a French impressionist?

Are you missing Moebius? The late, great Jean Giraud may have gone to that airtight garage in the sky, but never fret, because Goran Parlov has been channelling his spirit in Mark Millar's new series *Starlight*. Millar's homage to Golden Age space heroes such as Flash Gordon, Buck Rogers and John Carter has surprised everyone by not being (a) gratuitously crass and obnoxious and (b) little more than a scripted storyboard for Matthew Vaughn's next movie. The real draw, however, is Parlov's art. Stippled rock formations ahoy!

The "Take The Rest Of The Day Off" award for least effort put into a double-page spread... goes to Javier Pulido for this ultra close-up of Shulkie's eyes in *She-Hulk* #2. Colourist Muntsa Vicente probably did more work here than Pulido. Then again, it's a LOL moment at the end of a rambunctious girls' night out story, so who really cares? In other news: mysterious worldwide shortage of green ink continues to baffle experts.

Do consider giving up the day job Charles Soule, writer of the abovementioned *She-Hulk*, is surely the hardest-working person in comics today. In addition to his scripting duties on the Jade Giantess's new monthly, he's also pounding the keyboard on *Swamp Thing*, *Red Lanterns*, *Superman/Wonder Woman*, *Thunderbolts* and the upcoming *Inhuman*. That's on top of his day job as an attorney. Let's hope he decides to go full-time in the comics biz, not just so that we can read more of his stuff but so there'll be one less practising lawyer in the world.

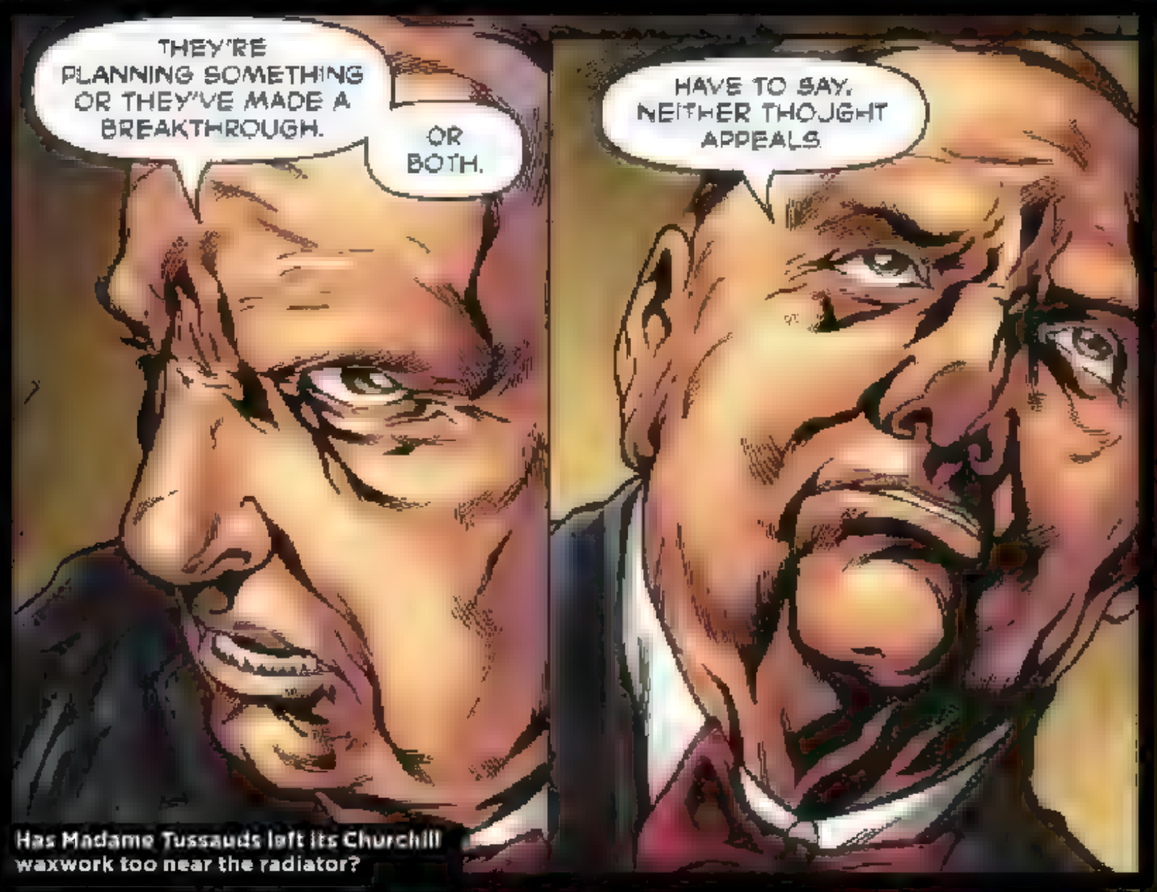
Question: can you tell what's going on in the panel below from *Forever Evil* #6? Is Lex Luthor putting a hand over Nightwing's mouth in an attempt to make him shut up? "Sshhh, lad, the grown-ups are talking!" Nightwing: [thinks] "Oh man, I wish this guy hadn't just been eating burritos." Actually no, it's Luthor killing the former Robin by suffocating him. Not that you'd know it from David Finch's artwork. Quite possibly the least dramatic superhero death ever.

Who put more green than effort into a splash page?

What is Lex doing to Nightwing?

How is Garth Ennis leaving a bad taste now?

Taste issues Over the years, Garth Ennis has given us more than a few "Holy crap!" moments. There's been Arseface and armadillo sex in *Preacher*, Wee Hughie's unfortunately timed act of cunnilingus in *The Boys*, and just about any page of *Crossed* you care to mention. Ennis may well have outdone himself, however, with this image from *Rover Red Charlie* #3. Here at *Panel Games* we're all for kindness to animals, but you have to draw the line somewhere. Where's that bottle of extra-strength Optrex? We need to clean our eyes.

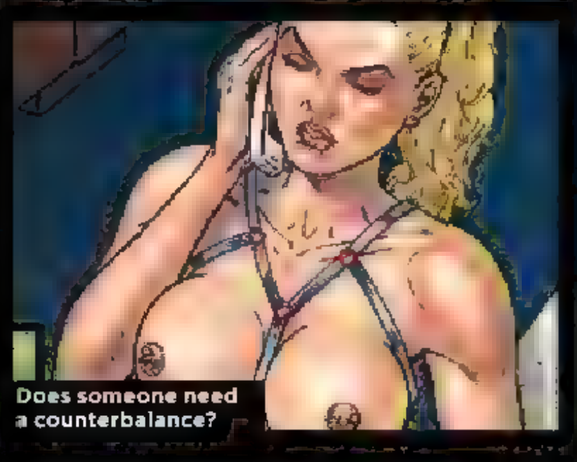


Has Madame Tussauds left its Churchill waxwork too near the radiator?

disfigured hillbilly bestialist enjoying his post-coital cigarette hasn't offered the goat a smoke too. Are there no real gentlemen left in this world?

All You Zombies We love George Romero. King of the zombie flick, the man who single-handedly invented the shambling-undead-apocalypse genre – who doesn't love George Romero? Without him we'd never have had *Shaun Of The Dead* or *The Walking Dead*. We'd also never have had Brad Pitt's *World War Z*, but you can't blame George for that. We have to confess, though, that his *Empire Of The Dead* miniseries for Marvel is as messy as a disembowelled corpse. Vampires and zombies! Together! Who'd have thought it? Err, well, Max Brooks, with *Extinction Parade*. And Dan Abnett with *The New Deadwardians*. And Bobby Crosby with his *Last Blood* webcomic. And David Hine with *FVZA*. And... We could go on, but we won't.

It's Bapgirl While we're still all hot and bothered, how about Jonathan Ross's *Revenge*? In particular, how about the ageing movie star protagonist's girlfriend Candy's fake boobs? As drawn by Ian Churchill, you could bounce a coin off those puppies. Somewhere on Earth-2, Power Girl is looking on and going, "Hmmm...!"


Does someone need a counterbalance?

Department of Deferred Gratification 1: Issue #5 of Matt Fraction's *Sex Criminals* has been delayed by over a month. Now, we hope you don't think we're mentioning this purely as an excuse to make some smutty jokes. Oh no, not us. But you have to admire the staying power being shown by Fraction and artist Chip Zdarsky. They're keeping us hanging on, tantalising us. How they're managing to hold out so long, we don't know. We can hardly bear the wait, and may go off the boil if the comic doesn't come soon. Still, a late release is better than a premature one.

Department of Deferred Gratification 2: Where is issue #2 of *Sandman: Overture*? Comics readers haven't been kept in suspense this long since the final issue of *Camelot 3000* almost never appeared. Well, you can't rush perfection, I suppose.

The Incredible Melting Man "Mummy, who is the melty-face man in issue #10 of *Über*? I feel like I should recognise him." "Why, dear, that's British World War 2 Prime Minister Winston Churchill, as drawn by Canaan White." "He looks a bit like Clayface on a bad day. He scares me." "You shouldn't be reading *Über* anyway. It's gory and violent." "But Mu-u-um, I'm 43!" "Yes, dear. Bedtime now. Up you go."

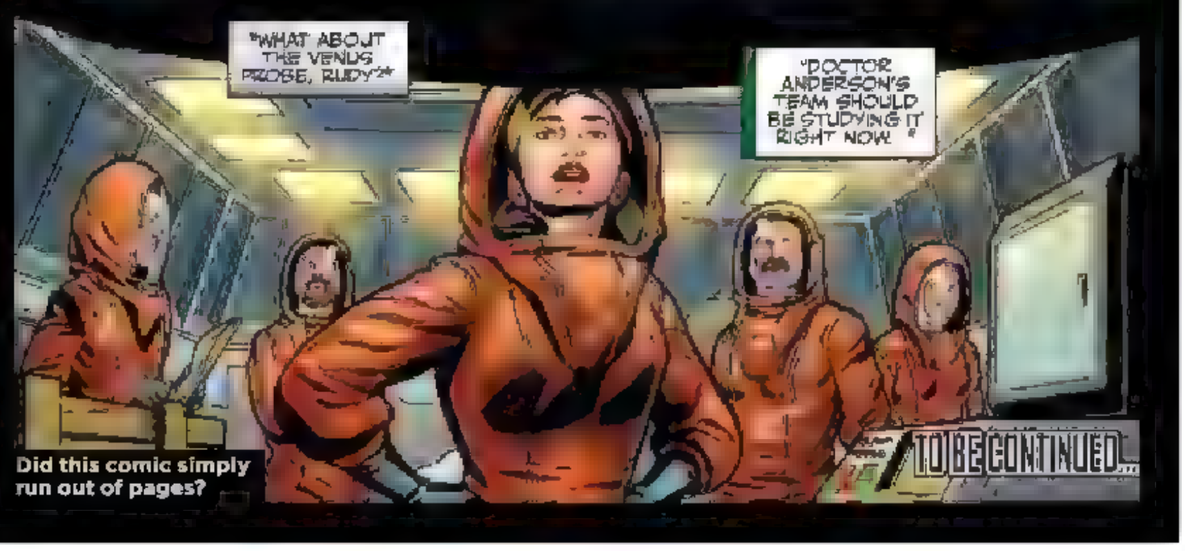
When pages run out! The non-event final panel of *The Six Million Dollar Man Season Six* #1 is surely the least suspenseful cliffhanger we've seen in an age. What happened, writer Jim Kuhoric? Did you forget when your deadline was? Did you lose count of how many pages you were supposed to be delivering so you thought you would just stop the story when you'd run out of room? Maybe you spent too long coming up with awesome Steve Austin bionic powers sound effects like "VRRRREEEETT", "TEENENENEN" and – best of all – "BANANANA".

Numbers just ain't as big as they used to be The *Panel Games* office was bemused to receive a press release from an overexcited Marvel announcing the "oversized, landmark anniversary issue" of *All-New X-Men* in April. Sounds good. So what momentous issue has the comic reached? 50? 100? 200, perhaps? Nope. 25. That's right folks, these days it's a landmark if a Marvel title manages a run of two years without a reboot.
Lee Kirby

Did he offer the goat a fag?

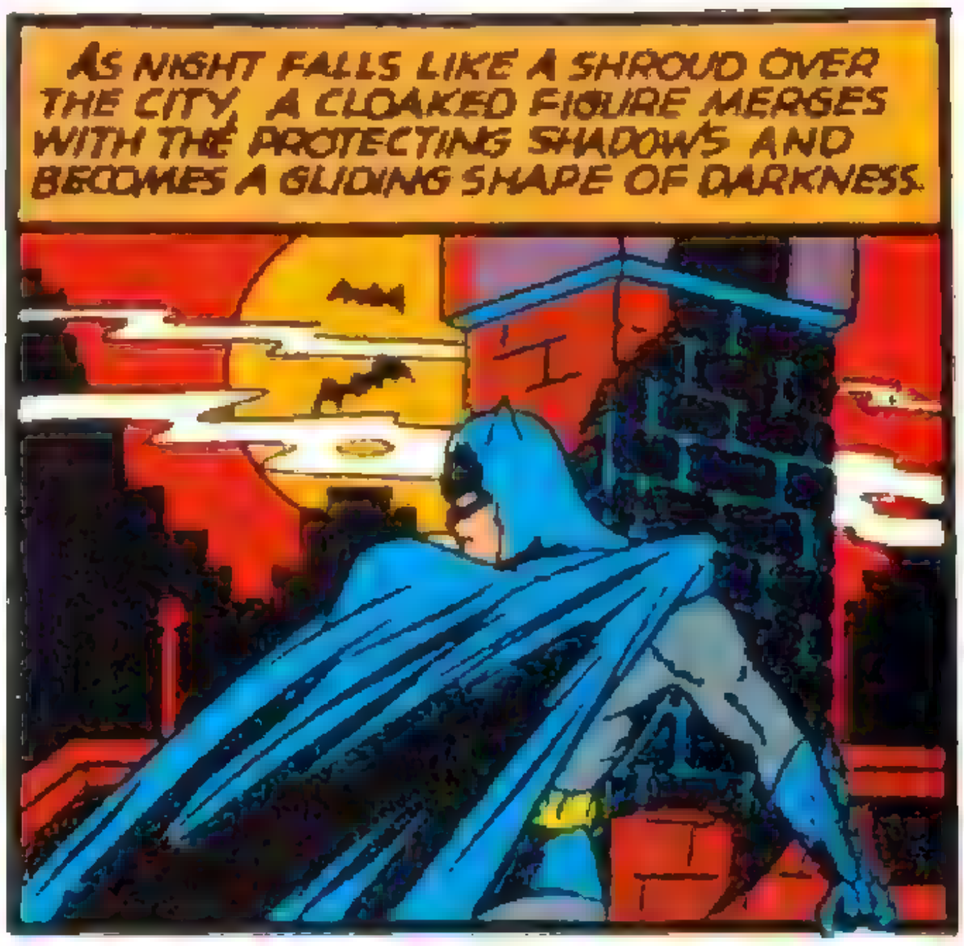
Introducing Ram-Man While we're on the subject of human/animal intimacy, who can forget the goat bothering scene in *Deadly Class* #2? Luckily the image isn't too explicitly graphic, but what's shocking is that the

ZANZIBAR
ZANZIBAR'S MY MAIN MAN SURVIVED DOZENS OF FIGHTS. HARDLY NEEDED ANY TRAINING. JUST NATURALLY AGGRESSIVE, I GUESS.
Who's jumping on a bandwagon they started?



Did this comic simply run out of pages?

The LEGEND of the
BATMAN
by BOB KANE
— WHO HE IS AND HOW HE CAME TO BE!
HIS WIFE AND HIS SON WERE WALKING HOME FROM A MOVIE...
W. WHAT IS THIS?
A STICKUP BUDDY! I'LL TAKE THAT NECK LACE YOU'RE WEARIN', LADY!


AS NIGHT FALLS LIKE A SHROUD OVER THE CITY, A CLOAKED FIGURE MERGES WITH THE PROTECTING SHADOWS AND BECOMES A GLIDING SHAPE OF DARKNESS.

KNIGHT WRITER

CELEBRATING 75 YEARS OF THE BATMAN

Born the same year as Batman, Denny O'Neil went on to become the single most influential man in the Dark Knight's 75-year history. Here he talks exclusively to **Joseph McCabe** about being the man behind the legend

For 75 years the Batman has watched over his city, guarding Gotham from countless criminals and megalomaniacs. But if there's one man who's guarded Batman more than most through those years, it's comic book writer and editor Dennis "Denny" O'Neil.

Starting in 1971, when he redefined the character in a run of stories illustrated by Neal Adams, O'Neil brought an appreciation for pulp potboilers and film noir to the Dark Knight detective, returning him to his roots while underlining the word "detective" before a world grown used to Adam West's campy crusader. He even created a villain who would address Bruce Wayne by that word, Ra's al Ghul. In the '80s and '90s, O'Neil served as group editor of DC's *Batman* comics, overseeing the publication of such groundbreaking titles as *The Dark Knight Returns*, *Batman: Year One* and *The Killing Joke*, while shepherding the character through his 50th anniversary into the realm of box office mega-stardom.

A CHILD'S CONFUSION

O'Neil's connection to the Batman began long before all that. He first discovered the character while a small boy making his way home from church.

"I would have been five or six," the now 74-year-old scribe tells *Comic Heroes* from his home in New York. "My family wasn't a bunch of readers but my dad read the newspaper and he did buy me comic books. On Sunday morning, usually on the way back from mass, we'd step into a little neighbourhood store, and he'd order milk for the family and I could have a comic book. I remember being a little puzzled by Batman, because did he fly or not? I couldn't tell. My reading skills were pretty rudimentary. That was my first encounter with Batman."

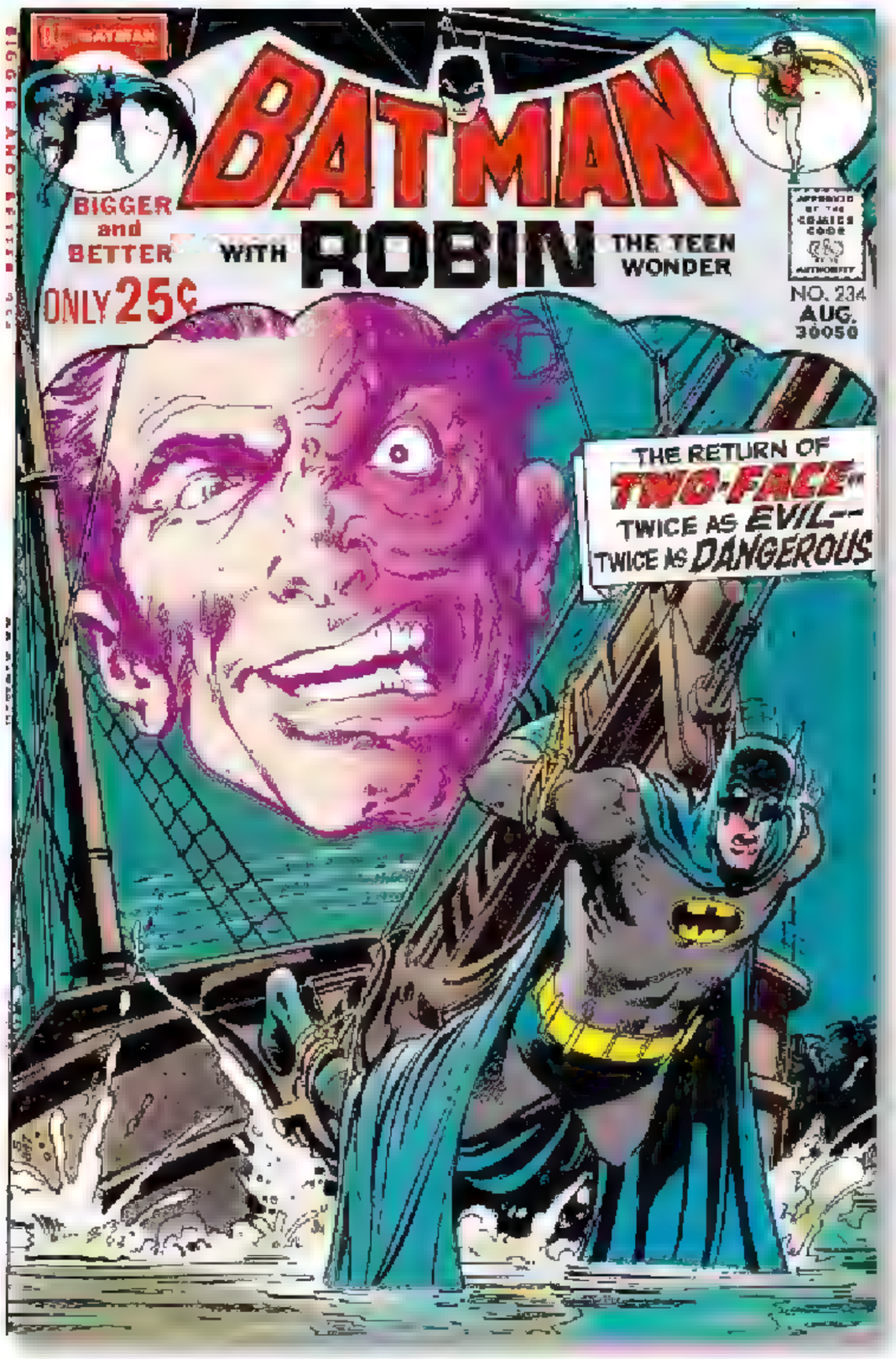
Above: The mak ng of the man Bruce Wayne's life would never be the same aga n

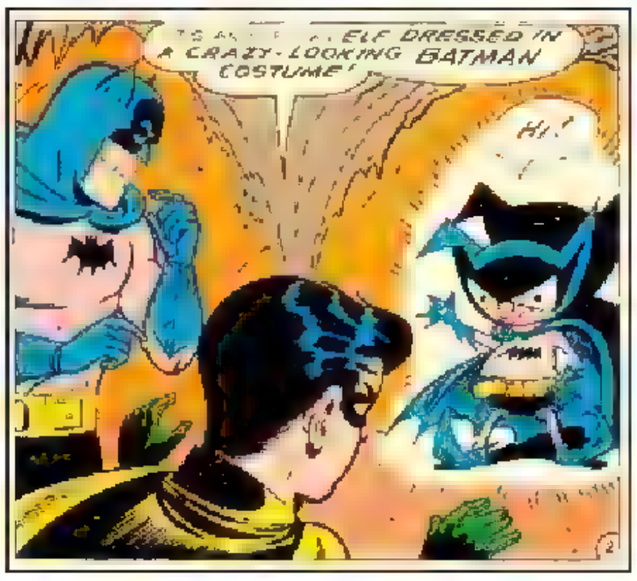
At that point, the character had already evolved from the vigilante who, like O'Neil himself, was born in May 1939 (in *Detective Comics* #27).

"There have been, give or take, about five different Batmans," explains O'Neil. "Bill Finger and Bob Kane started out with a gentleman crime fighter. There were quite a few of them in the mass »

All images © DC.

Pizza Hut Collectors' Edition Vol. I
BAT MAN
"THE FUGITIVE BATMAN!"
GO GET HIM, BAT-HOUND! WE'VE GOT TO BRING HIM IN! HE'S WANTED BY THE POLICE!





Above right: O'Neil and Adams re ntroduced *Batman*'s gallery of rogues and Two Face led the way

media back then – a rich guy, who, to put it crudely, got his jollies solving crimes. Five issues into it, Bill Finger gave him an origin. I once had a chance to change that if I wanted and I didn't, because it sure ain't broke. It's a perfect explanation of who, what, and why he does what he does. He started as a vigilante. The Depression and the First World War had shaken people's faith in authority figures. So you had the private eye, the guy who was not really a member of the establishment and made his own rules. Then, with Robin 11 months later, he became a father figure, or at least the big brother you wished you had."

Soon after O'Neil discovered the Dark Knight, the character changed once more.

"By the end of the war, he was a cop. He had a platinum police badge. (I guess gold wasn't good enough for him!) Without any explanation as to what the mechanics of that were, he was a glorified law enforcer. The country, having just gotten through a really horrendous military experience, was not in the mood for vigilantes. So he became an authority figure."

But troubled times awaited Batman. After starring in two movie serials, the 1950s found him threatened by not only the Penguin and Two-Face, but the United States government.

"In the '50s they were scared to death," says O'Neil, "because comics had gotten blasted in editorial pages, and Senator KeFauver had hearings about them in lower Manhattan, and Fredric Wertham had written his book, *Seduction Of The Innocent*. So he became a daytime character, what I think of as light science fiction – you know, the occasional time travel story, things like that. There was very little mention, if any, of the murdered parents. He was Gotham's most prominent citizen. It may have been perfectly appropriate for its time. It's not my favourite *Batman* period, but I'm not gonna throw rocks at it either. The writers and artists had to at least try to do stories that wouldn't possibly offend anybody, and they had to make a living."

Below: The jazz themed *Batman* #224 "Carnival Of The Cursed"

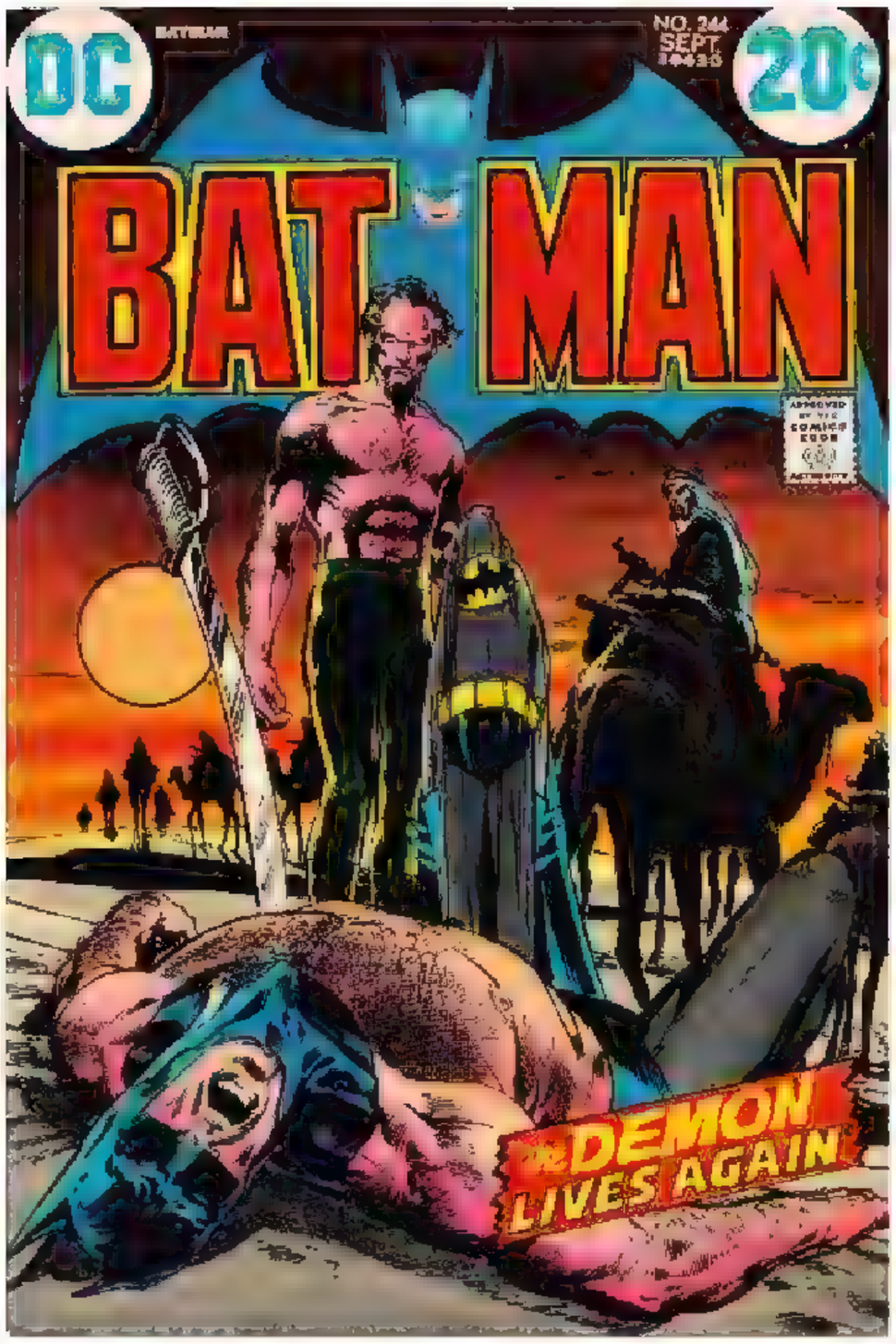
DON'T CARRY ON CAMPING

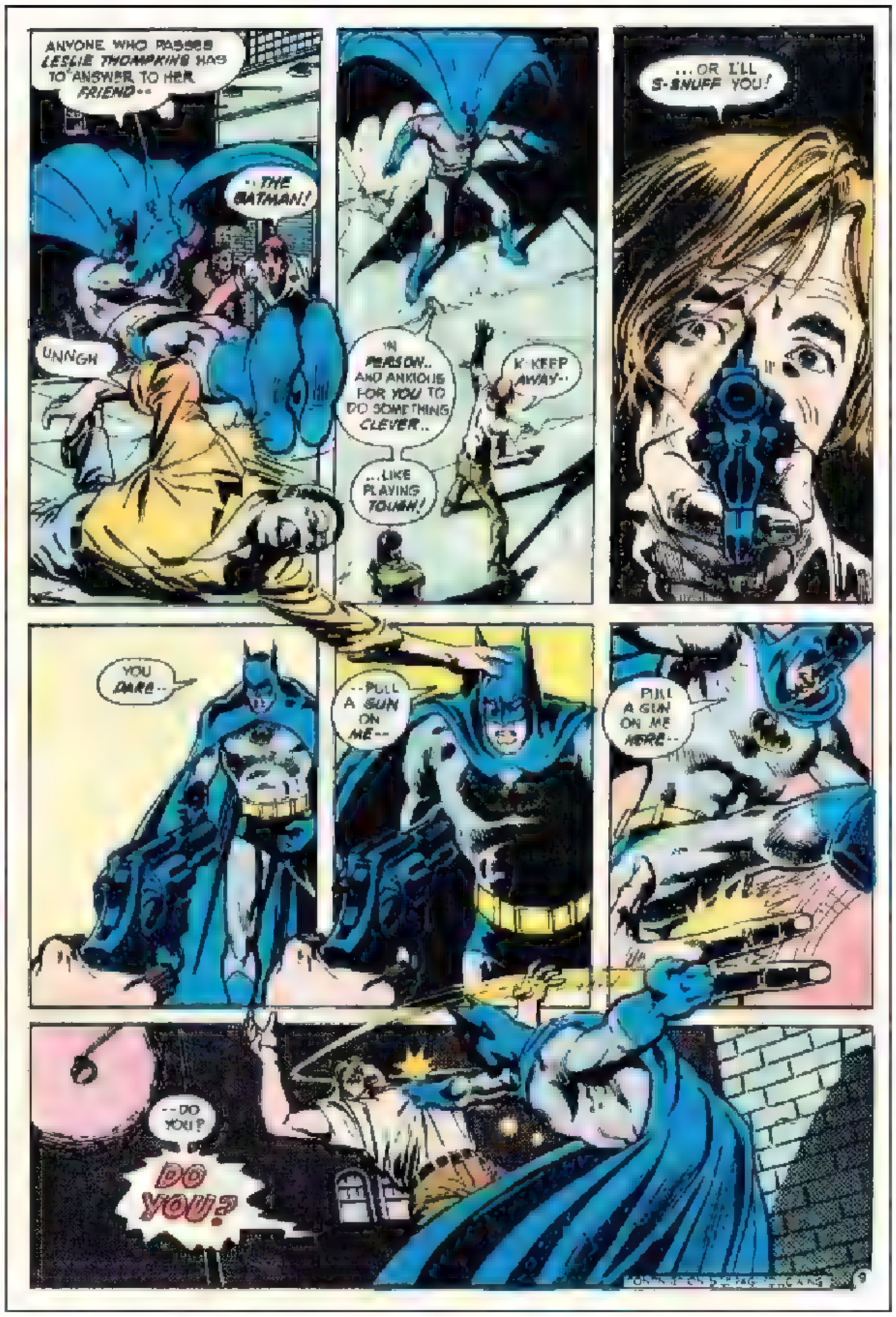
Comics' avoidance of offence was refined until it begat the era of pop art and camp, which spawned the first live-action *Batman* TV show in 1966, starring a deadpan Adam West and Burt Ward.

"Then came the comedic Batman in the '60s," sighs O'Neil, "when the country was in a rebellious mood. That was fertile ground for comedy, but not so much for comic book guys. I asked Stan Lee the morning after the first *Batman* television show episode aired, 'How did you like it?' He said he liked the 30 seconds of animation at the beginning and not much else. But the show was enormously popular for two years. It crept into the third year not so popular, and then it was gone. The joke was basically, 'This is what I loved when I was a kid, and now that I'm a 28-year-old Wall Street guy with a mild drug habit and a closet full of Brooks Brothers clothes, look how silly it is...' Because the TV show was having an influence on the comic's circulation, they tried to follow suit, not too successfully. Then when it was gone it was gone. At that point DC editor Julie Schwartz, Neal Adams, and I entered the story."

The trio's approach is often described as "back to basics", but a newfound complexity, and a new level of maturity, highlighted their stories. Gone were such '50s and early '60s tropes as Ace the Bat-Hound and the mischievous

HA HA HA
HA HA HA



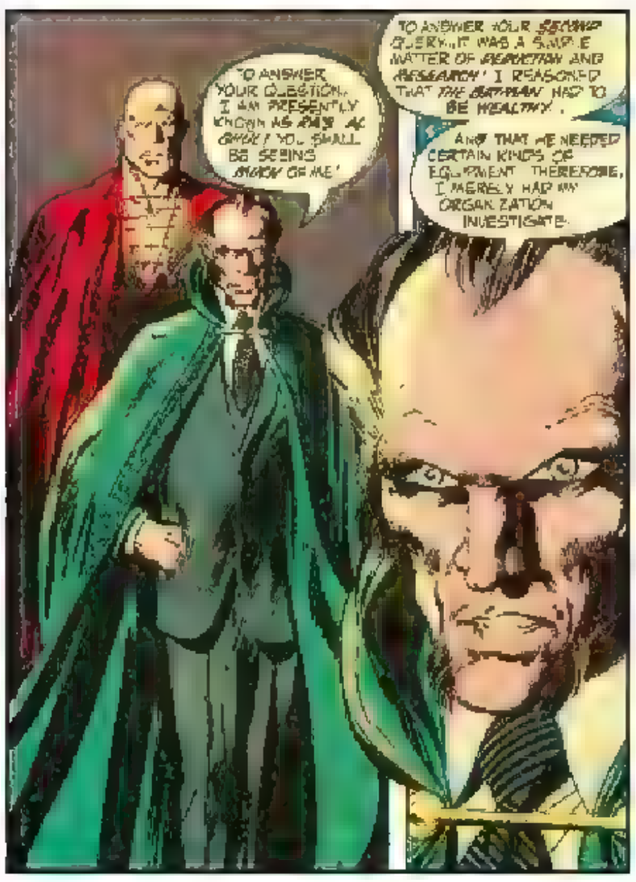

ANYONE WHO PASSES LESLIE THOMPKINS HAS TO ANSWER TO HER FRIEND--
...THE BATMAN!
UNNGH
IN PERSON.. AND ANXIOUS FOR YOU TO DO SOMETHING CLEVER..
...LIKE PLAYING TOUGH!
I KEEP AWAY--
...OR I'LL S-SNUFF YOU!
YOU DARE--
--PULL A GUN ON ME--
PULL A GUN ON ME HERE--
--DO YOU?
DO YOU?

Above: *Batman* #244, the finale to the Ra's al Ghul stories
Right: "There Is No Hope In Crime Alley". O'Neil retells Batman's origin.

memory. Batman was, by 1940, a father figure, or an uncle or a big brother, and by 1945 he was a cop."

Besides emphasising mystery, O'Neil reinvigorated the Dark Knight's rogues' gallery, crafting the best Two-Face story yet in *Batman* #234's "Half An Evil" (Aug 1971) and adding a dimension of homicidal mania to his favourite villain, the Clown Prince of Crime, in *Batman* #251's "The Joker's Five-Way Revenge" (Sept 1973).

"Almost every myth system I know about has its trickster figure. In a way he represents chaos. You take Batman, who, for all his theatrical flamboyance, is pretty much the face of logic and order – you couldn't have a better villain than the Joker to put against him. For most villains, there are principles and rules. We don't know what the Joker's reasons are, but that's okay. That becomes the reason... What we have now, who is perfectly embodied by Heath Ledger, is the greatest trickster figure in pop culture. Probably my best Joker story is 'Five-Way Revenge', the first one I did. By that time the people who hated comics had gone away and I was able to actually make him a murderer."


"TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTION, I AM PRESENTLY KNOWN AS RA'S AL GHUL! YOU SHALL BE SEEING MUCH OF ME!"
TO ANSWER YOUR SECOND QUERY...IT WAS A SIMPLE MATTER OF DEDUCTION AND RESEARCH! I REASONED THAT THE BATMAN HAD TO BE WEALTHY.
AND THAT HE NEEDED CERTAIN KINDS OF EQUIPMENT. THEREFORE, I MERELY HAD MY ORGANIZATION INVESTIGATE.

GHUL POWER

The arch-villain with which O'Neil is most often associated is his own creation, the ageless eco-terrorist Ra's al Ghul, introduced in *Batman* #232's "Daughter Of The Demon" (June 1971).

"Julie had a name – Ra's al Ghul, which means 'head of the demon'. I have no idea where he got it, but I went home and began to work with that. We introduced Talia before we introduced her daddy, [in *Detective Comics* #411, May 1971]. Bob Brown drew that story, and I must have had Ra's in mind when I wrote it. Working on that, I guess I began to see another opportunity to talk about some of the stuff that was really concerning me. So we gave Ra's a benevolent motivation. You can certainly quarrel with his methods – he wants to eliminate 90% of the people on Earth, so that the remaining 10% can rebuild and undo the damage that's been done to the environment. That's actually a commendable end, but Ra's is a loony bird. He's been alive for 400 years and he's become a maniacal sociopath; and he has this daughter who is obviously the one person in the world that Bruce Wayne should mate with, but they each have their hang-ups. She has a daddy hang-up and he has a refusal to consider consorting with a known criminal."

The writer is quick to credit his artist partner for Ra's unique look. "It was one of the times when Neal Adams was really on his game. Instead of a guy in a mask and a spandex suit, which was the way supervillains were, he gave him something exotic but believable, and he gave the character gravitas that no other comic book villain had... The movie version omits the immortality bit, and that's fine. My personal image of Talia would have been the actress Angie Harmon, and we got Marion Cotillard in the movie. But that's a perfectly valid thing for Chris Nolan and his people to have done."

In addition to Adams, O'Neil collaborated with other esteemed *Batman* artists

TREMBLING WITH RUPT, THE BATMAN CRASHES HIS FIST INTO GOOCH AGAIN
...AND HIS MIND REELS SPINS LIKE A DERVISH INTO THE PAST...
...TO 21 YEARS AGO THIS VERY NIGHT, WHERE HE AND HIS PARENTS WERE STANDING ON THIS EXACT SPOT, CHATTING ABOUT THE MOVIE THEY'D JUST SEEN...
WHEN A GUN-MAN EMERGED FROM THE SHADOWS...
...AND AS THE BOY WATCHED IN HORROR, TWO SHOTS WERE FIRED...
...AND HIS FACE CONTORTED IN A SILENT SCREAM AS HIS MOTHER AND FATHER CRUMPLED TO THE COLD PAVEMENT...
LATER, THERE WERE POLICE-MEN AND REPORTERS, BUT NO-BODY NOTICED THE BOY WRACKED WITH ENDLESS SOBS...
...NOBODY EXCEPT A WOMAN, WHO KNELT BY HIM AND SAID...
"I'M JESLIE THOMPKINS, COME WITH ME, I'LL... I'LL DO WHAT I CAN"
AND IN ALL THE WORLD, THERE WAS NOTHING... NOTHING EXCEPT THE WARMTH OF HER ARMS AND THE COMFORT OF HER SOOTHING WORDS...
10

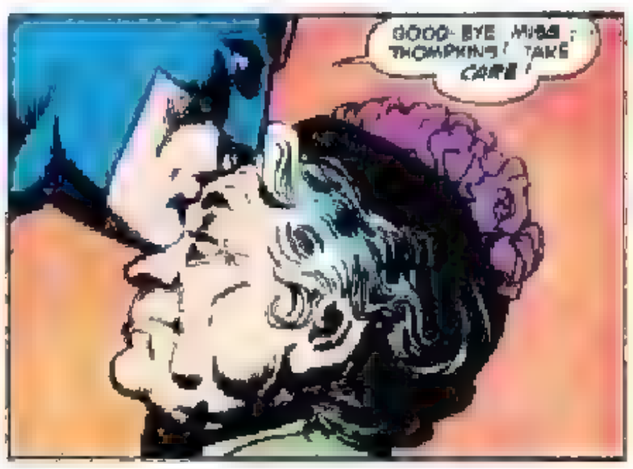
The Dark Knight Rises – the Denny O'Neil cut

"The latest *Batman* movie was the only one since 1989 that I hadn't seen an advance script for," reveals Denny O'Neil. "I was marched into the theatre by security guards and I had no idea what to expect. Later I found out that my wife Marifran and I were sitting in front of Christopher Nolan and his wife... Nolan got Batman right. He's a talented director who was respectful of the source material but realised he was working in a different medium. He had 70 years of *Batman* to choose from, and I think he picked judiciously. *The Dark Knight* is the first movie of that kind I can remember that doesn't end with two guys bashing each other... I have only one quibble about *The Dark Knight Rises* – I'd have cut the last 30 seconds.

"And if I'd known that Christopher Nolan was sitting behind me," laughs O'Neil, "by God, I'd have turned around and told him that... 'Listen, Chris, you gotta get rid of that thing in the cafe. What are you thinking about? The movie's about redemption. Come on!'"

throughout the '70s, including Marshall Rogers – who illustrated the experimental prose piece in *DC Special Series* #15's "Death Strikes At Midnight And Three" (June 1978) – and Dick Giordano, who drew the definitive post-Silver Age origin story in *Detective Comics* #457's "There Is No Hope In Crime Alley!" (March 1976).

"Dick really hit his pinnacle with that," says O'Neil. "That was a bad period in my life, and I don't know that I was doing much good work. But there was an obvious hole in the *Batman* backstory. He was eight when his parents were murdered in front of him. X years later he shows up as Batman – what about the intervening years? Then half of that springboard was

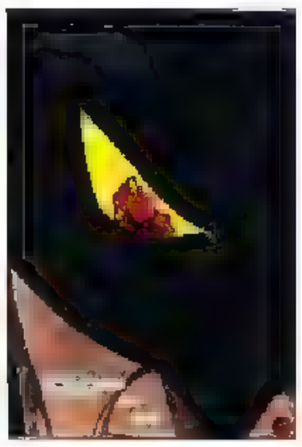


I really don't much believe in violence. I don't think it often solves problems. I'm certainly not prepared to say never, I've changed my mind a little bit about that in the last 10 years – with the fanatics out there in the world who will not be saved unless they kill people like me."

"There is No Hope in Crime Alley!" also introduced readers to a new ally for Bruce Wayne, Dr Leslie Thompkins, whom O'Neil based on real-life social worker Dr Dorothy Day.

"She was the close friend of the mother of my first wife, and the godmother of one of my two or three best friends. Leslie Thompkins is named after Thompkins Square Park, which was a big hippy village hangout in those days. We created that story to fill that hole in the Bruce Wayne biography, but also to introduce a dissenting voice, someone who tells Bruce Wayne, 'What you're doing isn't right. Violence isn't the answer.' We weren't going to mention it much, but for the sake of a rounded characterisation, if nothing else, it didn't hurt to have it there."

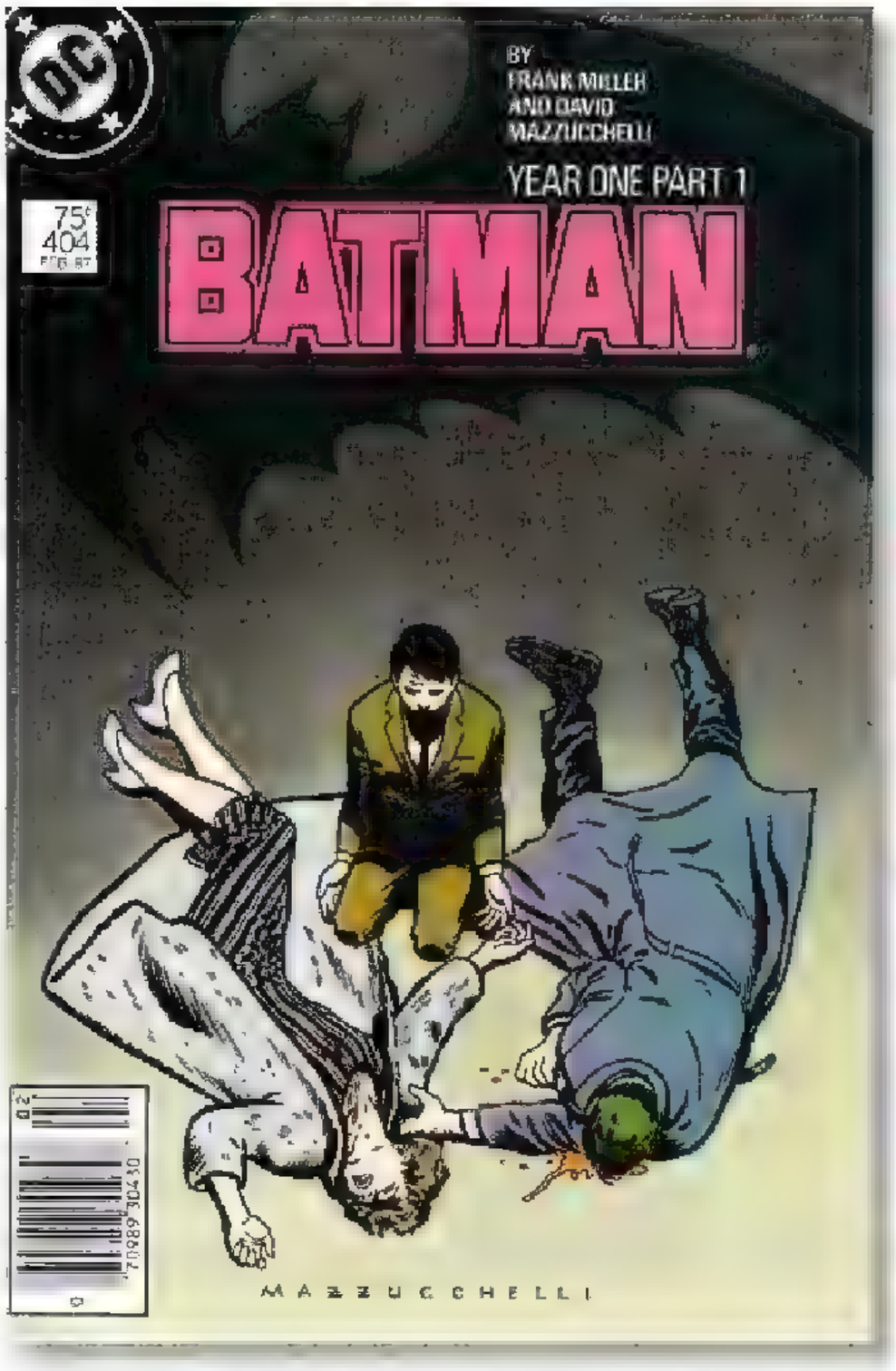
When O'Neil took over the *Batman* books as editor in 1986, among his first tasks was the publishing of Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* and *Batman: Year One*, both of which ushered in a new era for Gotham's Guardian.



"Frank Miller darkened it a lot, changed the emphasis, with *Dark Knight Returns*. It was certainly the next step in the evolution that began with Neal and myself. I facilitated the publication of that book, and then talked to the writer about why I was probably not going to refer to it again. We didn't say it didn't happen, and later writers have put it solidly in the continuity. But I don't know that the writer ever forgave me for that. One of the things that editors get paid for is to make those kinds of decisions. We're not talking about right or wrong here, but we are talking about consistency."

JUST LIKE STARTING OVER

Year One was originally slated as a graphic novel, but O'Neil convinced Miller and artist David Mazzucchelli to first print it in the monthly books. "One of my jobs was to kind of redo *Batman*. *Year One* was obviously going to be a different kind of Batman story, done by two creators I had great faith in. So I went to Dave and Frank and said, 'If you let me publish this as a serial in the comic book first we will guarantee it will be in hardcover within six months or so. You won't suffer financially



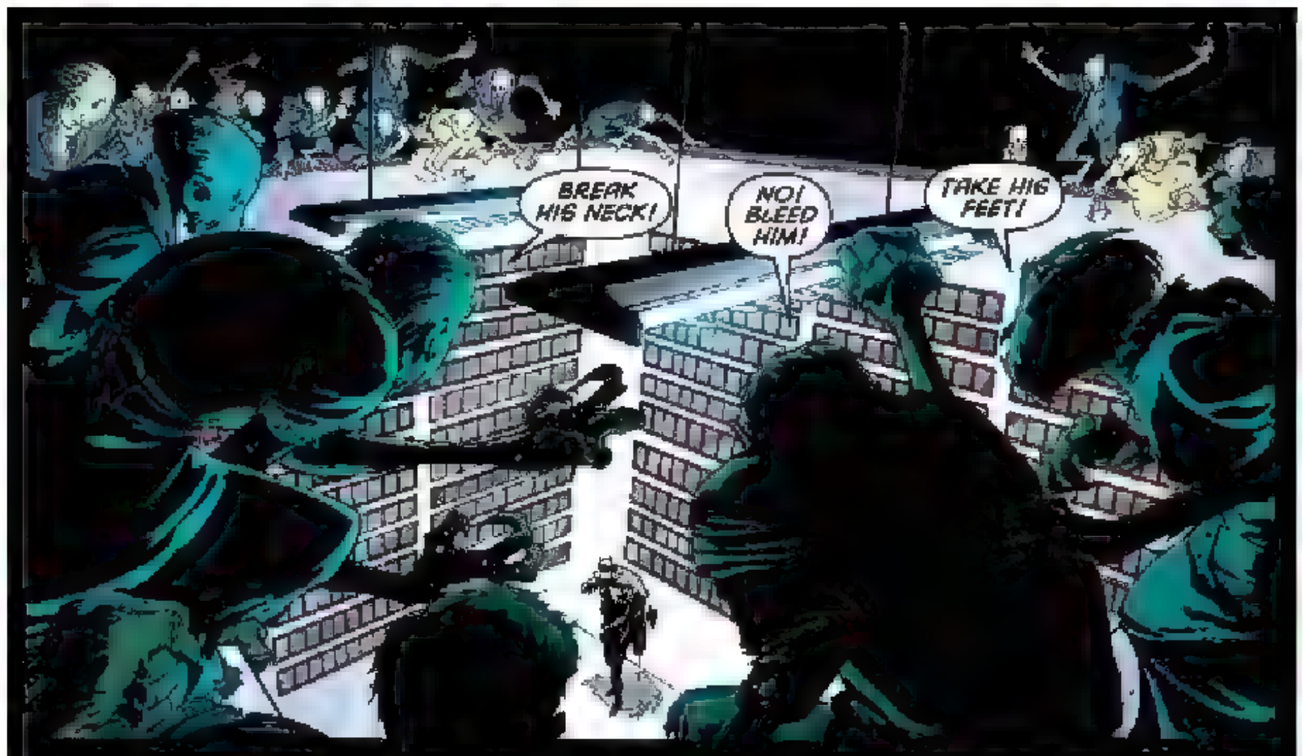
“Both of Miller’s books ushered in a new era for Gotham’s Guardian”

or any other way, but it will be the best possible message I can send to the readers that this is not their father's *Batman*.'"

As for the Batman movies that *Year One* and *Dark Knight Returns* inspired, O'Neil remarks, "When the first Tim Burton movie happened, in 1989, I may have had quibbles. But you can always quibble about anything. It was a huge hit, and it took Batman seriously. The second film seemed to be two movies, but again they delivered at a certain level. Then came Joel Schumacher. Joel is one of the nicest people on Earth, but I don't agree with his interpretation of the Batman mythos. Some of that he blamed on interference and I don't doubt that that happened. Even with Chris Nolan, it's a given when you're doing this kind of job that you might have to make some minor concessions."

As for the Batman's future – be it in films, comics, or something else – O'Neil is confident the legacy is secure.

"Almost everybody is doing a version of a guy who is obsessed by a childhood tragedy, that has motivated him to achieve physical and mental perfection. Add the technology to that, which I was reluctant to do, but which certainly has a place in the mythology, and you've got Batman."



GOTHAM'S CURRENT CURATOR

When a character has a legacy as deep and rich as Batman, how do you take the hero forwards? For Scott Snyder, it all comes down to mortality and making the hero his own...

From Denny O'Neil to Alan Grant, Frank Miller to Grant Morrison, the good and the great of comics have steered Batman's adventures. Now Scott Snyder is at the helm on Batman's eponymous series. For Scott, Batman's ultimate antagonist is the city of Gotham itself, while the thematic core of his approach is the notion of Batman confronting his own mortality.

"That's what the Joker story was largely about," says Scott. "The Court Of Owls was realising that no matter how much you might rule the city as its hero, there are generations that came before you and that will come after you. It's very much about the tragedy and heroism wrapped up in the notion that Batman is doing something that will make him legendary, while at the same time offering a constant reminder of his own humanity and loneliness. He has no family and no life outside of his crusade. In that way it's wonderfully heroic and admirable and that's why he's my favourite hero. At the same time it's self destructive and dark, and that intersection of elements in his psychology is what makes him endlessly fascinating to me."

One of Scott's biggest challenges lay in finding his own way to approach the character. "When I started on *Batman*, I fully admit Bruce is so intimidating and looms so large in my head, that it's hard to write him without being derivative," he says. "But as you write him over a period of time – I'm into my third year at this point – he becomes someone who is intensely human and you know him better than anybody else because it's your particular interpretation. You see other people's interpretations as fully formed psychologies. I can tell Grant's Batman right away and I see how he works psychologically. Similarly, Frank Miller's Batman or Denny O'Neil's Batman are very different from ours. Talking to Grant in San Diego this year, he made a comment that you have to trust in your own version of him and he made a joke, 'Even when you kill him.' I realised he has an endgame for his Batman in mind, meaning he knows how his Batman finally goes down even if that story isn't written.

"I do too and that's what that short that I did in *Detective* #27 with Sean Murphy was about. It's accepting that your Batman is your own, and even his death or how he defies his own death is something you interpret as a writer that is very personal. It's really about making him a character that feels creator-owned for you. The only way you can get past the intimidation and write stuff that's really personal in the book, is to take what you love about him and stay true to its core, but bend it towards your own iteration, so it speaks to the things that you love and fear the most about him." **David West**

Below: In the alternate future of Frank Miller's *Dark Knight Returns* a booze-addled Bruce comes out of retirement

DOES COMIC ART NEED TO MOVE WITH THE TIMES?

With sales of digital comics growing, do comic book artists see them as a challenge, a threat or an opportunity? **Stephen Jewell** finds out...

Is paper a thing of the past as far as comics are concerned? When the *Independent* published a story this March claiming that Marvel is considering ditching physical floppies in favour of a complete shift towards digital publishing, the allegation seemed slightly premature and sensationalist. Marvel declined to comment, of course. But whether or not days are numbered for the good old paper-based comics – or how many or few of those days there might be – nobody would deny that the digital grip on the industry is going to grow; very possibly exponentially.

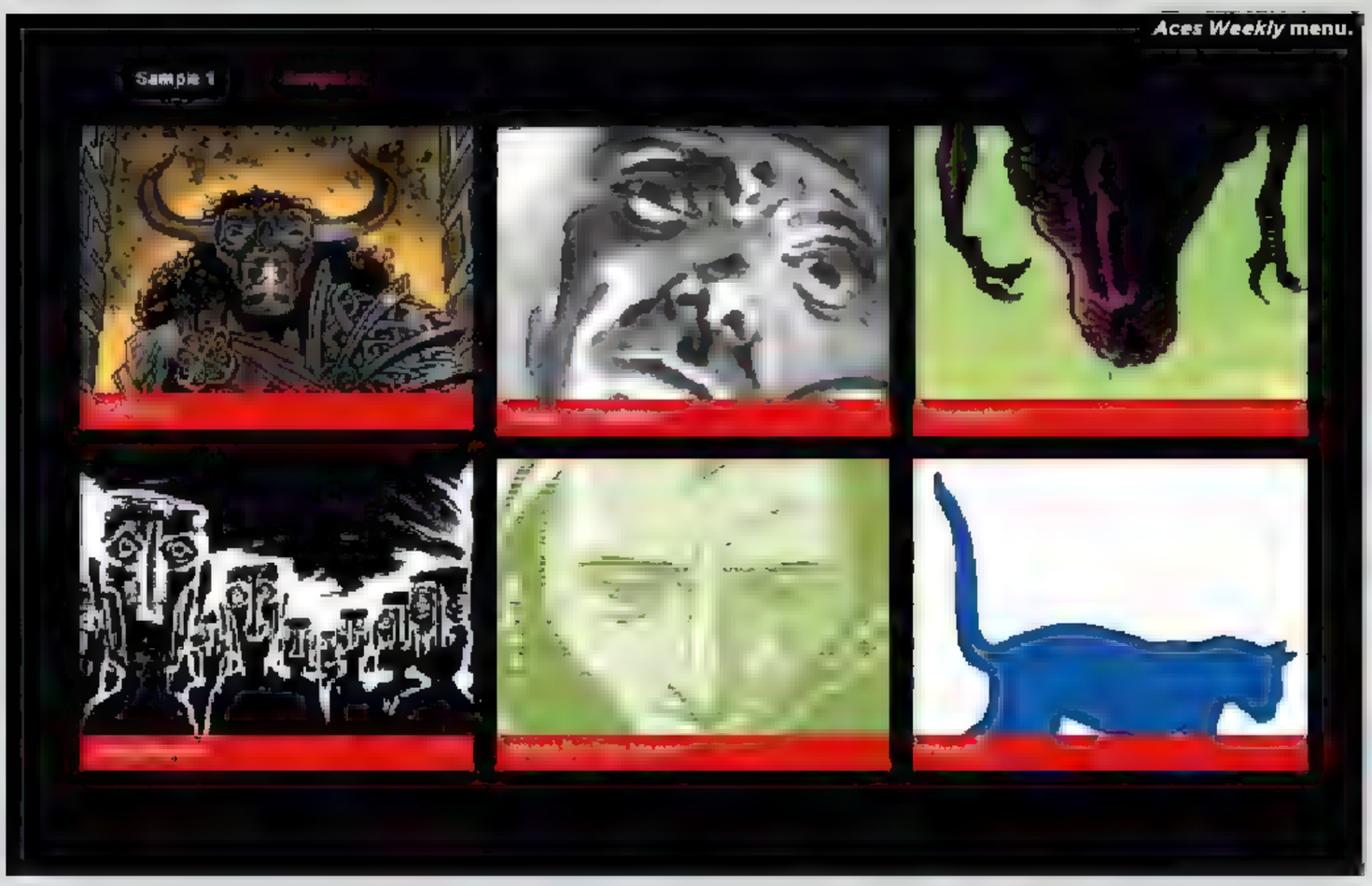
So where does this leave the artists? They've pretty much grasped digital techniques as a way of creating comics – after all, Photoshop is their friend, meaning they can churn out pages faster and earn more money – but does drawing for digital comics present more new challenges or problems? No comics publisher is satisfied with simply scanning in the pages and bunging them in an app; from Guided View to Madefire and beyond, the industry has big plans for the way we read – and indeed listen to – comics.

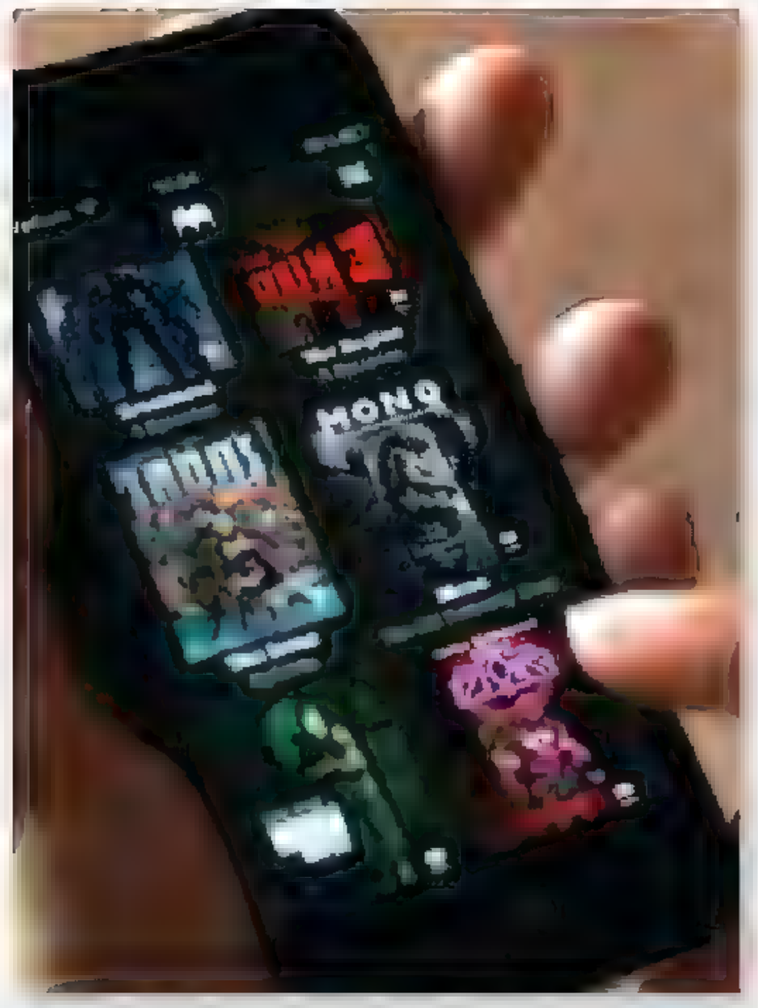
"WE SHOULD BE EXCITED! HOW MANY TIMES IN A LIFETIME DOES THE CHANCE TO TELL STORIES IN A NEW MEDIUM COME ALONG?" LIAM SHARP

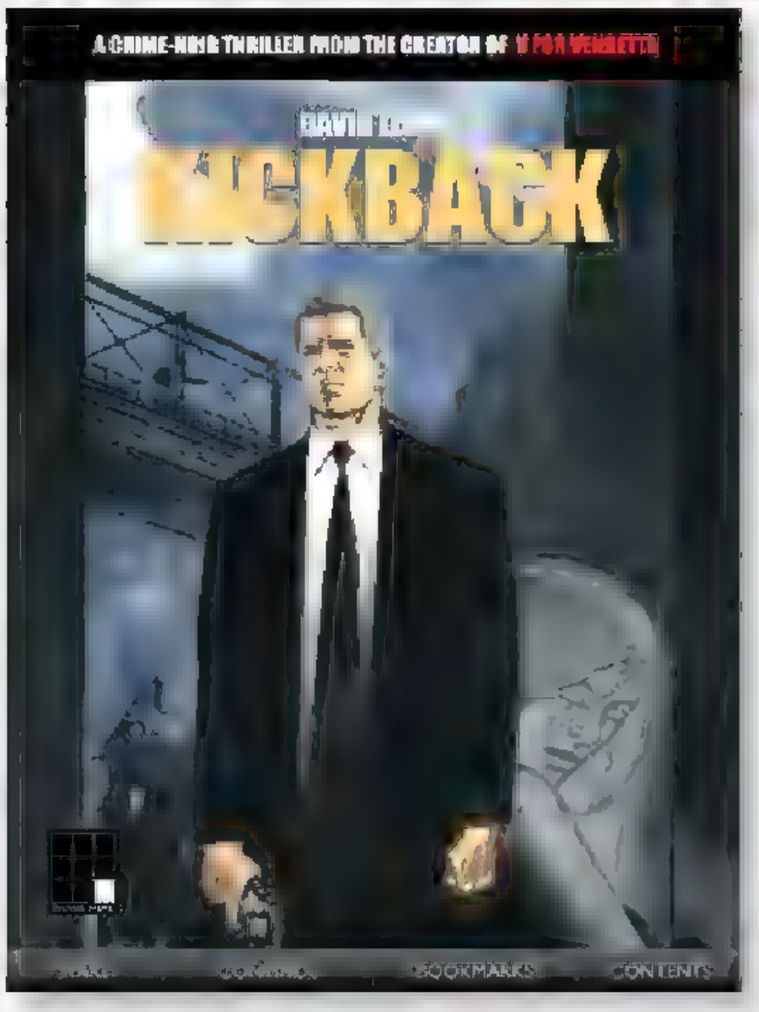
TAKE A GUIDED VIEW

Designed as a means of transposing the traditional comic book experience for the download market, online comics provider ComiXology's Guided View reading technology has not exactly met with universal approval since its introduction in 2009. Liam Sharp, founder of revolutionary motion comics company Madefire, reckons that it's an unsatisfactory stopgap that neither does justice to the original comics, nor encourages digital comics to develop: "Guided View is all about repurposing print; work that was not intended for the digital space originally. If you create material for digital first, you should use the platform as the medium."

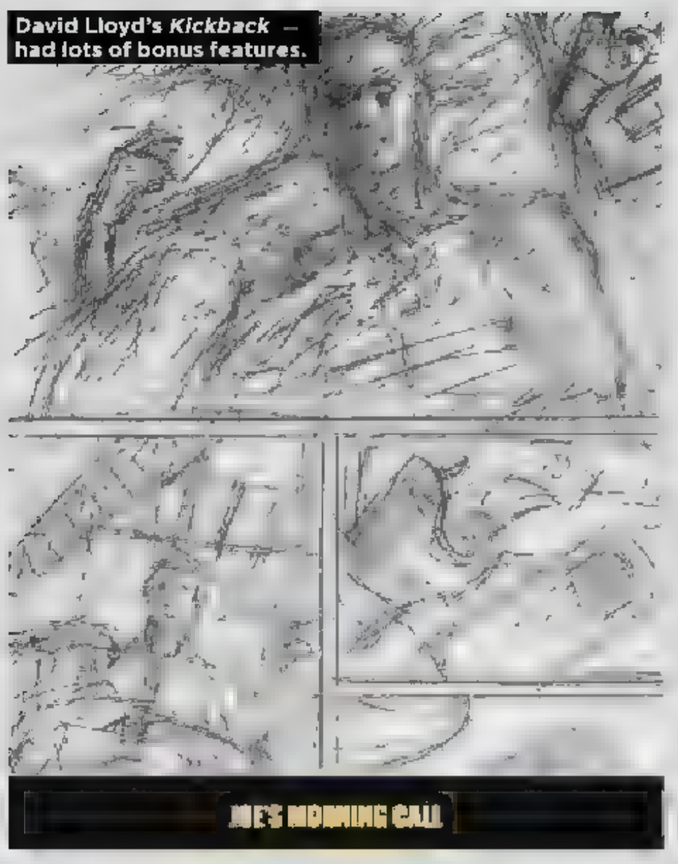
Death's Head II co-creator Sharp reckons that at a time when the industry's leading lights should be striving to break down narrative boundaries Guided View's faithful replication of traditional panel progression is actually holding the medium back. "You can tell a great story in any medium, so why not digital? We are, as comic creators,







"USING A SCREEN AS A SURFACE FOR PUBLISHING COMIC ART IS EASIER, CHEAPER, QUICKER AND BETTER FOR THE CREATOR" DAVID LLOYD



the most visionary, creative and productive storytellers in the world. Why would we want to limit ourselves in any way? These platforms exist, and they're not going anywhere. We need to boldly embrace them and try out new things, step away from our comfort zones and just see what we can do in this space. The truth is that if we don't do it, others will. And there's a whole generation coming that barely knows what paper is. We'd better get used to that and adapt because not doing so is basically cutting off our noses to spite our faces."

Known for his work on *Fearless Defenders* and *Celtic Warrior: The Legend Of Cu Chulainn*, Will Sliney is part of that new wave of artists who are equally at home with a tracker mouse and software programmes such as MS Paint as they are with brush and board. "That paper texture has bizarrely started to feel a bit alien to me," he admits. "It definitely makes the job quicker. Every time I have to fill in a black area with ink as opposed to clicking the Fill tool I am reminded of that."

Adept as he is with the latest cutting edge devices, Sliney insists that it doesn't come as naturally to him as it will to the next generation of illustrators. "I had to struggle through years and years of crappy processors and long loading times due to the technology of the period," he says. "Young artists who are starting out drawing digitally right now will be the first to completely bypass paper. They will get, at a much younger age, that the computer, like the pen, is just a tool."

CHANGING LANDSCAPE

For seasoned pros such as David Lloyd (*V For Vendetta*), though, the adjustment has not proved so easy. Even though he only bought his first computer around 2000 – "way after everyone else in the biz" – he has quickly made up for lost time, establishing online anthology *Aces Weekly* in 2012.

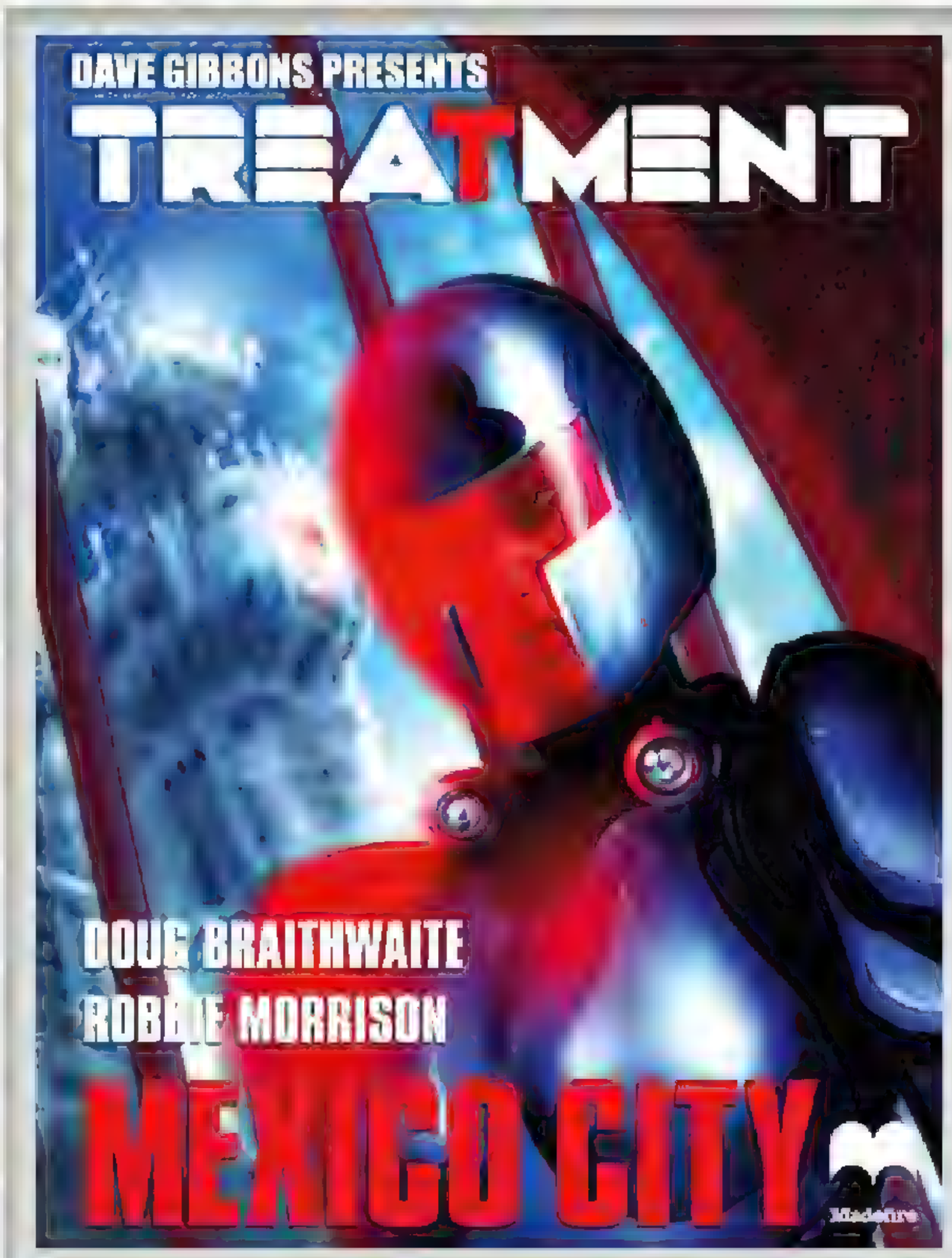
"At first, I just played around with the mouse and a graphics tablet to make pictures but I really wasn't interested in developing that further," he recalls. "That was until I did (2005 graphic novel) *Kickback* when I wanted to use some special effects, as well as use my own hand-lettering font. Then much later, I started thinking about what you could do with strips in a computer context. One of those thoughts was, instead of paper, to simply use its screen as a surface for publishing comic art storytelling, which is much easier, cheaper, quicker and better for the creator – if we can make it work. And that's what led to *Aces Weekly*."

Contributors include John McCrea, Lew Stringer, Kev Hopgood and Lloyd himself, and *Aces Weekly*'s eclectic list of stories is designed to fit all sizes of computer screen. "Our comic pages are landscape, not portrait so they sit comfortably on all devices," says Lloyd. "Other than that they use the usual techniques of regular comic art in the main, depending on how much our creators want to play around with them. Our policy is to give them complete freedom as far as that's concerned."

Previously available only through the comic's own website, *Aces Weekly* recently released its inaugural collected edition through ComiXology. But while the team was offered the use of Guided View, not one of the various contributors has so far taken up the opportunity.

"ComiXology may still want to use it as an adjunct – because they like to offer the possibility of phone-reading to their customers – but nothing in *Aces Weekly*'s pages has been designed for that possibility of use," explains Lloyd. "My personal view is that Guided View shouldn't have a place in learning the art of good comic strip creation, but there's no reason why it couldn't be used to tell stories that are designed specifically for its use. But then that would be something different, just as motion comics are different."

With its more cutting edge approach to sequential art, Madefire has quickly become a pioneer in the field of motion comics, »



"It's very much a new medium and that's why we call our episodes "motion books", which is something even our parents can understand," reasons Sharp. "Motion comics took comics and created rather limited animations that you have to watch, not read. But we want you to be able to control the story, *and* to read it. The words matter, the writing matters. To be able to stop the page and study the art is paramount. The sound was something we initially weren't going to do at all, but when we tried it we found that it added so much that we ended up putting it on all our books. You can always turn it off if you find it distracting, although of course, none of it really matters if it's a good read!"

ALWAYS EVOLVING

The 11th century Bayeux Tapestry, with its sequential panels depicting scenes leading up to the Norman Conquest, is often cited as an example of a very early comic strip and Sharp believes that motion comics are simply the latest natural progression for humanity's instinctive art of storytelling. "We've written great stories on scrolls and in books, or drawn in the sand with sticks," he says. "We've filmed them in 2D and 3D and put them on TV and the big screen. Of course, we should put them on tablets and explore what is possible there. And we should be excited about it! How many times in a lifetime does the chance to tell stories in a new medium come along?"

With 25 years experience in the IT industry and as one of the collaborators on 2009's *Murderdrome*, the very first comic designed specifically for the iPhone, PJ Holden knows the pitfalls of trying to be a trailblazer. "I think we're still in the very, very early days of digital comics," he says. "Even ignoring all the potentials of what you can do with the medium such as audio, animation, choose-your-own-style adventures, Twitter links to panels, highlights of panels and video linked to artwork in panels, we're really still just on the ground floor of what a digital buying experience can offer."

By clinging on to antiquated concepts of what constitutes a comic book, Holden maintains that the medium is holding itself back. "I haven't found it in any way a challenge as either a reader or creator," he says. "It's a little sub-optimal as such because there's always a bit of wasted space, and occasionally some lettering fonts – particularly handwriting-style fonts – can be too small to read. But in general, it's neither a help nor a hindrance and we'll probably slowly see comics morph a little to make better use of that space."

He also doesn't believe that Guided View is necessarily the answer. "It's a help on an iPhone-sized device and an interesting novelty on an iPad-sized device but it doesn't give an enormous advantage to readers on a larger device," says Holden, who concedes that it could come in handy for the junior market. "But having said that, I can definitely see how it would be an attractive option to kids, or people who haven't grown up with the grammar of comics. I know a few comic creators have expressed an interest in doing comics

The very first comic created specifically for the iPhone.

incorporating not just animation but also sound and other effects into more fluid, tactile stories. "What we do is very different to comics," says Sharp. "We use time as the forward thrust; the gap between the image is no longer a gutter, unless you want it to be. Images and text can be revealed bottom to top and right to left without confusing the reader. Repurposing these books for print is going to be interesting, but we want to put digital innovation first and not try to mimic print. Tablets and mobile devices are smarter than paper, so why would you want them to behave like paper?"

Starting out with its own creator-owned work, the San Francisco-based firm has since forged crucial partnerships with other comic book publishers including IDW, Top Cow and Boom! Studios. After reconfiguring existing titles such as *Star Trek*, *My Little Pony* and *Transformers*, Sharp and his colleagues last year teamed up with DC on *Batman: Arkham Origins*, an online comic of the popular videogame which they neatly describe as "a multi-path reading experience".

"I THINK DIGITAL EDITIONS ARE GREAT. IT CAN ONLY HELP TO FEED THE HABIT OF COMICS AND LEAD TO MORE PRINT SALES" WILL SLINEY

Treatment from Madefire.

Shoot For The Moon from Aces Weekly.

specifically with Guided View in mind as it does offer some cool storytelling features. But comics are already pretty labour intensive, so I can't see many people going that way."

MAKING A SPLASH

But what about the splash page, that staple of physical comics? The widescreen effect of Bryan Hitch's famously expansive layouts on titles such as *America's Got Powers* are significantly reduced when shrunk down to fit a smartphone or tablet screen; could the traditional splash page conceivably become a thing of the past?

"There's nothing like the impact of a double-page spread in a print comic and yet," says *Murderdrome* creator PJ Holden, "in the digital medium, not only is that impact reduced, it actually has less impact than a normal page. Instead of letting you sit back and look on in awe at what the artist has intended, you have to rotate, resize and enlarge to try and read it, which is a frustrating experience."

But many artists refuse to change their practices to accommodate the iPhone generation – for the moment, at least. Even an early adopter like Will Sliney concedes that he never takes Guided View or any other aspect of online comics publication into consideration when bashing out the pages. "It's never changed how I put my pages together all that much," he says. "Maybe it can force an artist to pay more attention to the smaller details for when a reader reads a book in Guided View. That said, I always like to think of my work in print, rather than digitally. I do think digital editions are great, though, as it can only help to feed the habit of comics and lead to more print sales as well."

"I haven't really changed the way I work at all in response to the emerging digital aspect, whether that's to my detriment or not," adds *Half Past Danger*'s Stephen Mooney. "I still think of comics as physical items made of paper, and that's how I go about creating them. It's very possible »

The menu for Madefire.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DIGITAL COMIC

1985 The first online digital comic is Eric Millikin's *Witches And Stitches*, published on CompuServe. It was based on *The Wizard Of Oz*.

1985 *Shatter*, by writer Peter Gillis with art by Mike Saenz, is the first comic to have all its artwork created on computer. It first appears in the UK computer magazine *Big K* and is then published in the US by *First Comic*.

1988 *Iron Man: Crash* is the first digitally-created graphic novel to be published by Marvel Comics, with art by Mike Saenz.

1990 *Batman: Digital Justice* uses a combination of 3D modelling, vector illustration and CAD software.

1990 *The Black Diamond Effect* uses 3D rendering and scanned real-world objects.

1991 Hans Bjordahl's *Where The Buffalo Roam* is published on FTP and usenet bulletin boards.

1991 *Sandman* #19 uses Photoshop to create a progressive sunset effect.

1991 *Victor Vector & Yondo* by Ken Steacy becomes the first CD-ROM comic.

1993 David Farley's web comic *Doctor Fun* (the web's answer to *The Far Side*) is first published; it runs until 2006.

1993 Mike Saenz's *Donna Matrix* is the first 3D CGI graphic novel.

1996 Marvel launches Marvel Cybercomics with America Online – comic webisodes created specifically for the internet.

1998 *The Black Diamond Effect-Syntax E.R.R.O.R.* continues the 1990 adventures with better graphics.

1998 DC publishes *The Dome: Ground Zero* by Dave Gibbons and Angus McKie which uses Poser, 3DS Max and Bryce software for the first time in comics.

2005 Marvel Digital Comics replaces Marvel Cybercomics.

2007 ComiXology launches.

2007 Launch of Marvel Digital Comics Unlimited. Marvel assures comic shops that titles won't be added until six months after publication.

2008 Marvel releases *Secret Invasion: Home Invasion* online... comic shops not happy.

2011 Madefire launches.

2011 Marvel and DC both announce they will release all digital comics on the same day as the physical versions.

2013 Marvel relaunches Marvel Digital Comics Unlimited as Marvel Unlimited.

David Lloyd's *Valley Of The Shadows* from *Aces Weekly*, which is specificaly designed to take advantage of landscape screens.

Paradise Mechanism by David Hitchcock from, you guessed it, *Aces Weekly*.

"THE DIGITAL MEDIUM NEEDS TO BE EMBRACED – IF COMICS DON'T EXPLORE IT, THEY'RE GOING TO GET LEFT BEHIND" DECLAN SHALVEY

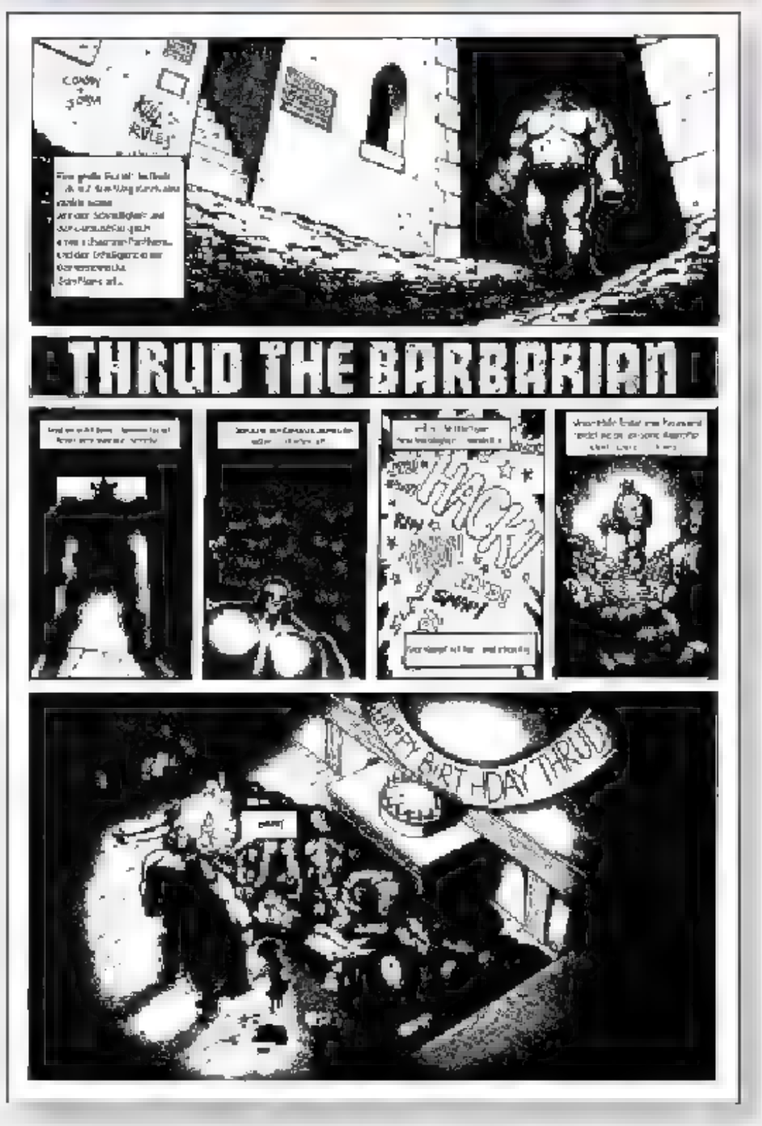
that the day will come when I'll have to adjust my methods accordingly, but for now I'll carry on regardless."

Moon Knight's Declan Shalvey agrees that there's been no pressure from Marvel to "Think Guided View!". "I generally work in US format and have no plans to change. While a lot of comics work on the iPad and other tablets, there's no guarantee that that format will stay the same, as such things are always in a state of flux. It's my approach to just make comics the way I do; they can be adapted afterwards. Aiming to compose a body of work to fit a certain format seems risky and potentially disastrous to me."

SPOILING YOURSELF

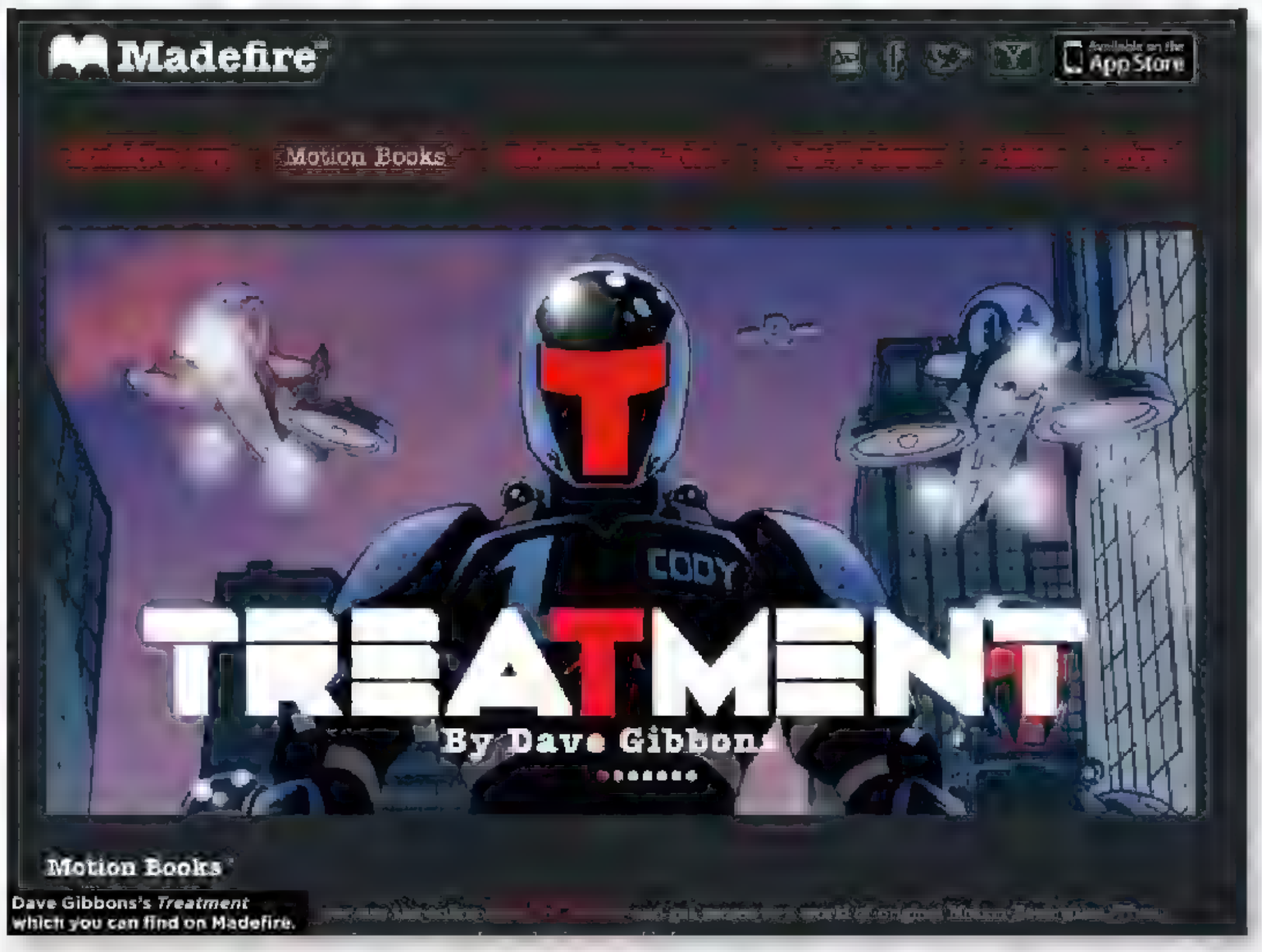
With online comics growing closer to film in nature, Shalvey admits that the individual's crucial control of pacing could be undermined as more people take to skimming stories. "With a page reveal in comics, there's always the temptation to skip ahead and ruin the story for yourself so that tension in stopping yourself from doing so is a unique experience," he explains. "With video streaming, you can easily do that and Netflix even has a little screenshot to accompany the time-stamp. While it exists so that you can find your place in the video or play back specific moments, it also means that you can potentially peek at what's going to happen."

Shalvey was initially sceptical of apps such as Madefire that tamper with the panel progression. "I felt that it would take the control away from the reader but I haven't actually found that to be the case as it all depends on how the reader wants to consume the story," he admits. "But it does show up some artists' terrible storytelling. I've seen some break panel borders and draw characters across other panels, which, apart from



Crazy Boss
"JOHNSON"? DIDN'T HE START DOING THAT WHEN I ASKED HIM TO STOP CALLING ME "MISS" AND START CALLING ME "MS"?
I JUST DON'T LIKE HIM HAVING A BLOW UP HIS BUTT ABOUT ME BEING FEMINIST BECAUSE I'M NOT
WE'VE BEEN OVER THIS 1,000 TIMES! JUST TELL HIM YOUR NAME'S MS. JOHNSON.
I KNOW I KNOW I KNOW! I'M JUST AFRAID I MIGHT BE UNINTENTIONAL! I COULD HURT HIS FEELINGS. BE SO CLUELESS! SUCH A DORK!
GOD IT'S WORSE HAVING A GOOFY BOSS THAN IT IS HAVING A SLIMY WEASEL! I WISH HE'D JUST MAKE FUN OF MY HOBBIES OR SOMETHING I DO THAT, THEN I COULD JUST HATE HIM AND FEEL GOOD ABOUT HATING HIM. THE WAY IT IS NOW, I DON'T KNO--
MS. JOHNSON
THERE SEE? HE'D DO IT AGAIN!

Crazy Boss has limited, but effective, animation.



Dave Gibbons's *Treatment* which you can find on Madefire.

being bad storytelling, is also a completely horrible experience when rendering panel-to-panel digitally as it's all over the place and makes no sense. But saying that, the more obtrusive techniques used in some digital comics are not to my liking."

Nevertheless, Shalvey welcomes how digital platforms have made comics more accessible. "I read many comics digitally but, saying that, there are choice titles – the titles that I enjoy the most – that I will wait to buy physical copies of," he says. "So an excellent method might be to release single issues digitally and then make the collections available in print. I still love comics as a kind of object, and that will never change for me. The digital medium needs to be embraced though, as the next generation aren't going to have the same sort of analogue hang-ups that we do, and if comics don't explore the digital medium, they're going to get left behind like a lot of other publishing."

SERVING TWO MASTERS

While digital has had a seismic impact on the mainstream industry, Roger Langridge (*The Muppet Show*) suggests that the effect it has on the independent sector could be significantly different. "It'll probably be more like the current division between superhero comics and alternative comics, still technically the same medium but serving different, almost entirely discrete audiences," he says. "I can see all superhero comics eventually becoming quasi-animated, because these days most of them are trying to push the same buttons in your brain as movies do, but alternative comics aren't trying to push the same buttons for the most part. So I suspect print won't ever completely die and there will always be comics that remain purely comics. I suppose at the back of my mind, I still think of print as being the ultimate goal, which is why I hedge my bets with web comics by making them printable but not the other way around, which no doubt makes me a dinosaur!"

Having debuted his creator-owned weekly strip *Fred The Clown* online in 1999, Langridge has had plenty of time to get to grips with the demands of the various interfaces. "I nearly always drew those stories in landscape format so that they would fit on a screen without scrolling," he says. "But that ended up being a problem when I eventually wanted to publish the work traditionally, as I had to redraw a great many pages in order to make them fit comfortably on a normal-sized comic book page. These days when I work for the web, I'm usually trying to serve two masters: I'll draw pages as if for print, but in four tiers, so they easily split into two landscape-format half-pages; or I'll design the panel layout so the panels can be rearranged easily."

Langridge isn't sure if innovations such as motion comics are truly advancing the medium and suggests that maybe we need a new name for things that are neither animation nor comics. "I prefer my comics without all the gewgaws," he laughs. "That may be an artist/reader division, I don't know. Maybe it's only cartoonists who have any resistance to this stuff, and even then, I can enjoy something like that if it's well done. I remember, way back in 1999, discovering Mark Martin's *Crazy Boss* webcomic. He would add little animated GIF effects, like having two characters shake hands with actual moving hands instead of motion lines, or sometimes just having characters blink as they reacted to something. I thought that worked because it was not really moving the panel through time, like a movie, it was just replacing a drawn effect with an animated one. That, to me, was still 100% comics."

EMBRACE THE DIGITAL

But with the inevitable prospect of comic books and digital technology becoming even more closely integrated in the future, Liam Sharp believes that creators should embrace that brave new world. "Without change there would never have been comics in the first place," he reasons. "But comics don't have to go away; print sales – as well as digital sales – are on the increase. This isn't a threat, it's a new place for creators to tell their stories in new and innovative ways, and I'm incredibly excited to see what the future holds because we're really only just touching on the possibilities here. What comes out of this will be a long way from what we currently understand as comics – but that's all good!"

COMIC HEROES PROMOTION

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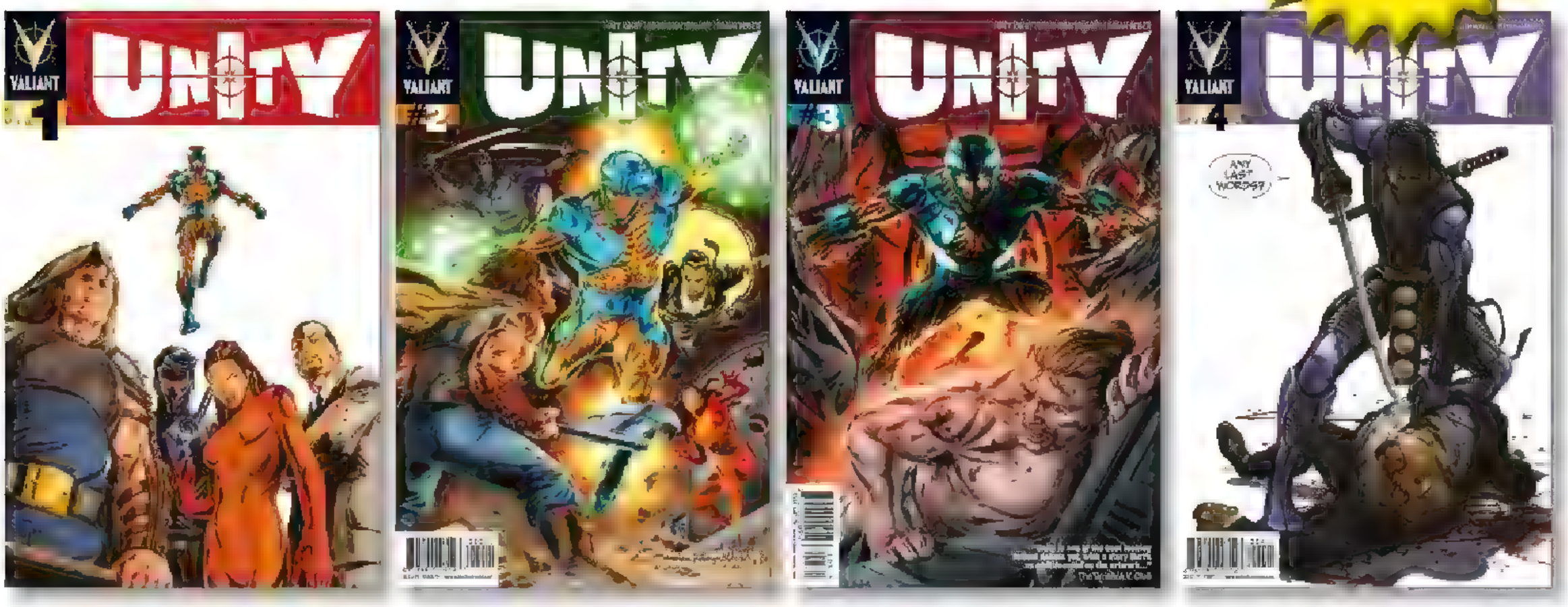

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COMIXOLOGY

VALIANT

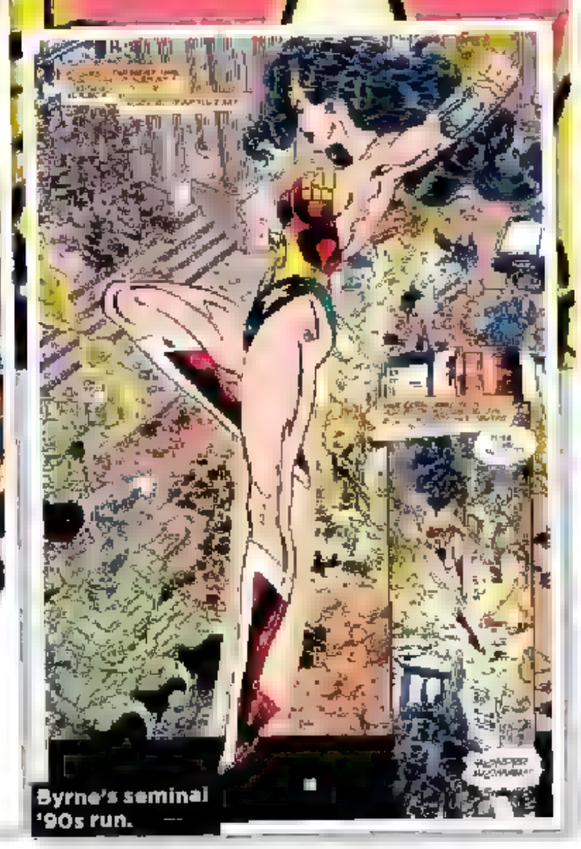
THE VIEW FROM A BOARD

Comic penciller **Mike Perkins** thinks that Wonder Woman can pose some artistic challenges

Wonder Woman's a tricky one. From an artist's viewpoint she's a visually arresting character to illustrate – with or without the star-spangled knickers. There's the classic brunette beauty, muscular and tall; statuesque but not a body builder… her power comes from within – blessed by the gods. The costume itself lends itself to subtle and personal interpretation.

Aside from the bodice, boots and bracelets one can add Greek flourishes and warrior-like accessories depending on the tale. A small pleated skirt? Not a problem. Leather-studded straps hanging from her golden belt? A useful adornment to administer a shorthand visual nod to Grecian warriors. The lasso? Hmmm… probably more of a cowboy influence there but as a handy lie detector it probably says more about the creator of the device than the readership of the character or the lady herself.

Nothing gets past the golden lasso.


Byrne's seminal '90s run.

Rucka's WW debut: *The Hiketeia*.

LIVING LEGENDS

I've followed a lot of the recent Wonder Woman stories after being originally enticed by the remarkable Pérez run in the mid-'80s that plunged Diana into the mythology of the Greeks her birth place of Paradise Island was based upon. It's a truly incredible run that lends itself to constant rereading and which, in turn, contains elements which have helped to inspire some of the more recent runs. Pérez wasn't the first to entertain the notion of the character's pantheonic past but he centered and grounded the character within it and still made it fresh to the newly-aware nuances of the readership that had just experienced *Watchmen*, *The Dark Knight Returns* and John Byrne's *Man Of Steel*.

The current, engrossing Brian Azzarello series has also squarely placed Wonder Woman amongst a rotating group of worn out, conniving deities and determined demigods, making Diana a daughter of Zeus, rather than originating as a clay sculpture, in the process.

One of my favourite recent runs on the book was written by Greg Rucka. After opening with the gorgeously illustrated *The Hiketeia*, he and artist JG Jones reintroduced a Diana who faced her responsibilities to both the here and now and the distant past on an equal footing. This was then reflected in her ongoing title when a lot of her time was taken up with her seemingly humdrum life as a foreign ambassador which aided Rucka in introducing a strong supporting cast and ultimately led her to facing down the Gorgon, Medusa. It was the kind of run I'd have loved to have illustrated.

One day perhaps I'll get the chance to put my own stamp on the character. I have some solid ideas about where to take the costume – appropriate to the script, of course – and I'll probably have some contributions to where to take the story; borrowing liberally from the mythological past but with an eye to the intriguing future, just as the finest runs have done so successfully before.

She'll still be tricky, though.

“I was originally enticed by the Pérez run that plunged Diana into the mythology of the Greeks”

A LONE WOLF IN LONDON

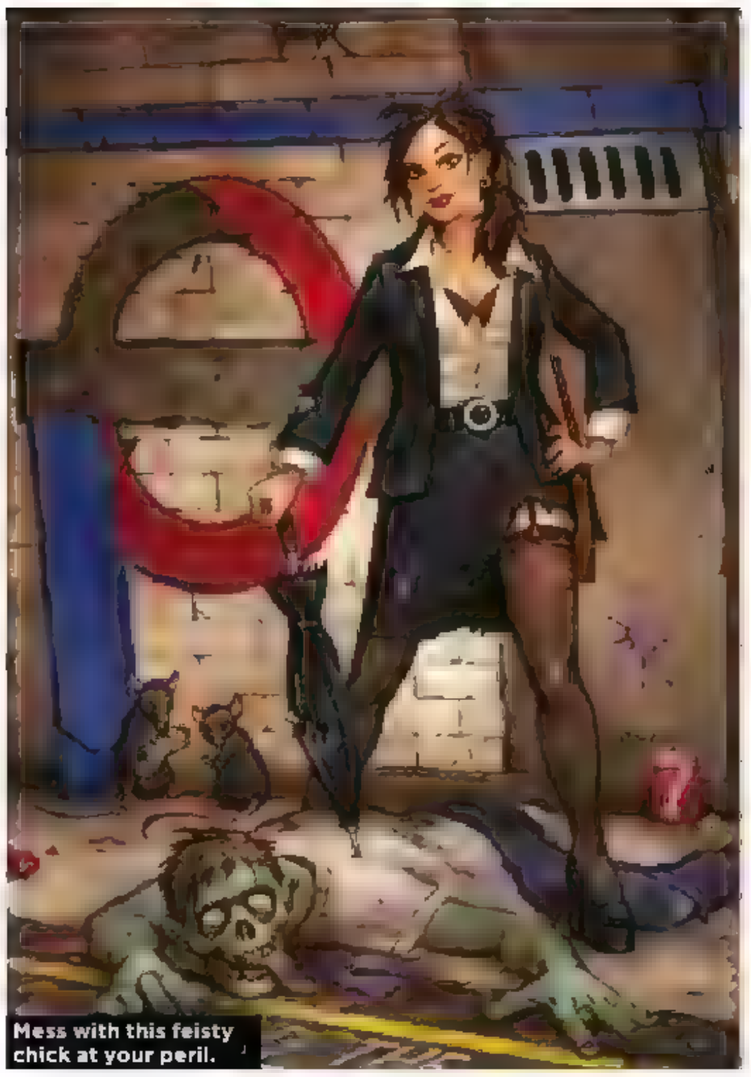
Horror comic creator John-Paul Kamath tells **Stephen Jewell** why he's blazed his own trail

"How do you break into comics?" That must surely be the question the professionals at any Comic Con are asked the most. Maybe more aspiring creators should take a leaf out of John-Paul Kamath's comic book and simply do it themselves.

After submitting numerous failed pitches and contributing to little-known American horror anthology *Trailer Park Of Terror*, Kamath decided to shape his own destiny. In 2006 he started an online monthly strip and the debut print edition of *London Horror Comic* hit the shelves two years later. A further five, increasingly lavish-looking full-colour issues have followed.

Kamath was persuaded to go it alone after trying and failing to get his work published by traditional

All images © London Horror Comic Ltd


Mess with this feisty chick at your peril.

City locales range from the 24/7...

...to seedy back-street strip joints.

The daily drudge has never looked bleaker.

means. "I sent a US editor the idea for an all-silent story about a pensioner dying alone in his flat but without a twist," he recalls. "He said it was 'creepy but not for them'. I thought the story had merit, so I had a friend draw it and we stuck it on the web. We ended up getting some good feedback from folks, including *Hellblazer* writer Jamie Delano. The act of publishing one short story on the web didn't make me a success, but the feedback did convince me that writing comics in my own way, and without having to ask anyone's permission, might have merit."

Kamath, who maintains that "the definition of success is getting what you want," has never looked back, but while his work has been praised by such esteemed figures as Garth Ennis and Stewart Lee, he is determined to keep his feet on the ground. "Staying level-headed about why you're getting into comics – especially self-publishing – is extremely important if you want to survive in the long term," he insists. "If your motive is to write the perfect Spider-Man story or get rich and famous, you're going to be disappointed!"

SCARE TACTICS

In a market dominated by spandex-clad super-types, Kamath's preference for succinct, self-contained tales of terror makes for a refreshing change of pace. Like its preceding volumes, *London Horror Comic* #6 boasts three spine-chilling yarns of varying styles and increasing nastiness.

"The short story anthology format has several benefits, which have been essential for *London Horror Comic*'s success," he says. "Each issue is easy to pick up and get involved in. You don't have to read the previous issues to get up to speed and you don't need to buy the next issue to find out what happens next. This makes the book very easy to hand to people at conventions and for them to make a quick call about whether it's for them or not. From a creative point of view, it allows me to experiment with the broadest definition of horror. Stories can range from psychological horror to a more visceral splatter-fest and even comedy. Unlike other anthologies where you have to rely on the diversity of the writers to provide a mixture of tones and styles, I can't fall back on a single way of writing. That keeps the writing fresh and alive for me and hopefully for the reader as well."

From eerily empty tube trains to seedy back-street bars, *London Horror Comic* also depicts many of the capital's recognisable locales in an unsettlingly unfamiliar light. "Horror can mean many different things, from the body and its vulnerabilities, to the mind and its fragility, or the heat or absence of our emotions," says Kamath. "As a city, London mirrors this eclecticism, which is reflected in the subject and tone of the stories. It's a dark, anonymous, frequently frightening and funny place, which is also compelling enough to make more than eight million people want to be a part of it. For me, it's the perfect marriage of genre and place that provides the inspiration for some bizarre stories. Taking things a bit deeper, horror is the genre for me that most approximates fairytales and how they can help children develop. The peculiar thing is that, as we get older, there are very few fairytales that address adult tensions and anxieties that are presented to us in modern life. But that's where the horror genre, at its best, can operate. I find this the most fascinating aspect of writing horror and using London – and its people and places – as my inspiration seems to work."

While Kamath is *London Horror Comic*'s sole author, having a regular art team in the form of Lee Ferguson and Dean Kotz also provides a sense of continuity. "When you're working with a creative team you trust, it's important to let them know the overall effect that you're trying to achieve but not necessarily mandate how that should be done," says Kamath. "They bring their skills to the table to make my story work better, so I let them do their jobs."

Mostly sold online and at conventions, *London Horror Comic* has attracted a loyal, diverse audience that seems to appreciate Kamath's distinctive vision. "While it can be difficult selling a version of horror that doesn't rely on any standard horror tropes and does incorporate humour, more often than not it's a great way of bringing people into the genre or at least getting them to dip their toes in the water," he reasons. "The most repeated comments I get from people who have read the book have been along the lines of 'I don't like horror or comics, but I liked your book'. That said, you also get the guy who walks past your table at a con with a copy of the latest *Walking Dead* omnibus under his arm and who tells you point blank that he's not into horror. The world's a strange and powerful place!"

"Stories can range from psychological horror to a more visceral splatter-fest"

You can order a copy of ***London Horror Comic*** *#6 at www.londonhorrorcomic.com.*

SHAPERS OF WORLDS

Biting back

Emma Vieceli

From vampire romance and teenage spies to an indie free-to-read webcomic, Emma Vieceli is forging her own path in comics

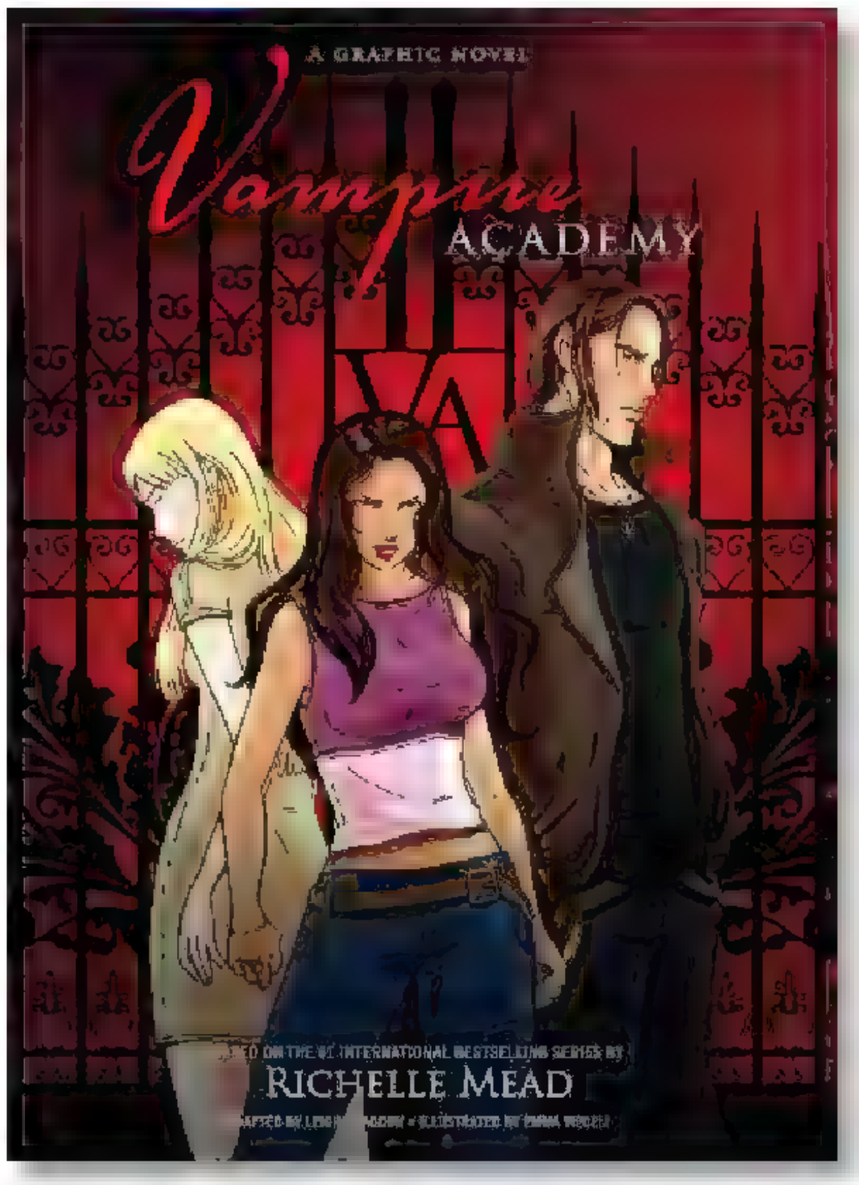
By Michael Molcher

BORN UK
HIGH MANGA SHAKESPEARE
NOW BREAKS
MORE www.emmavieceli.com

Even as her biggest project was hitting the silver screen, Emma Vieceli was already looking ahead – and the future for her is pushing the boundaries of comic books with a brand new indie series.

Having drawn for SelfMadeHero and former children's weekly *The DFC*, Vieceli worked with writer Leigh Dragoon on the graphic novel adaptations of *Vampire Academy*, the bestselling 'YA' paranormal romance novels by Richelle Mead, which tell the story of Rose, the teenage daughter of a vampire and a human, training to be a bodyguard for her "mortal vampire" BFF, Lissa.

But even as she works on an adaptation of the Alex Rider books, the Cambridge-based artist is penning her own free-to-read webcomic, *BREAKS*.



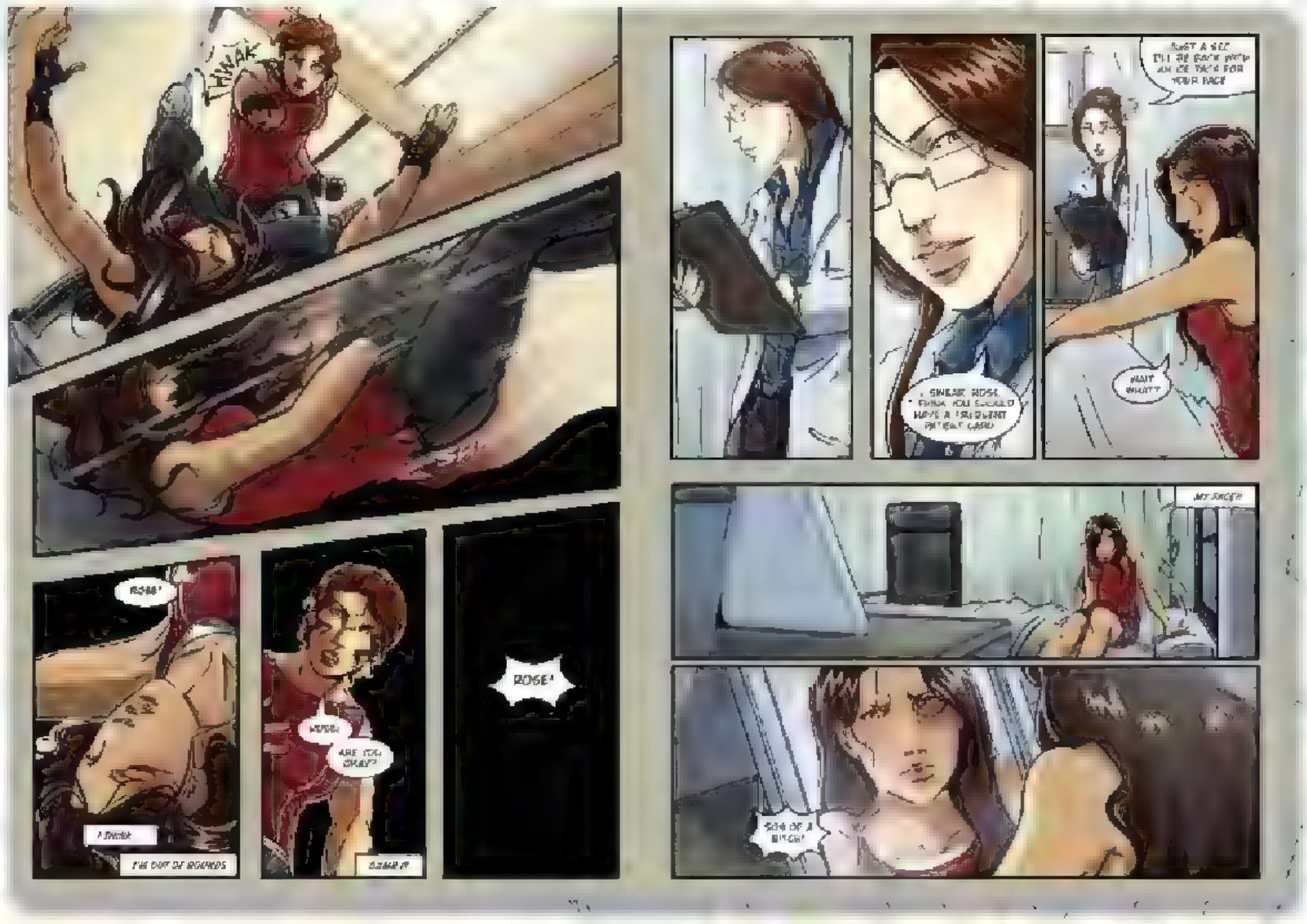
Comic Heroes: *Vampire Academy* is a massive series in the US, how did you come to work on the adaptation?

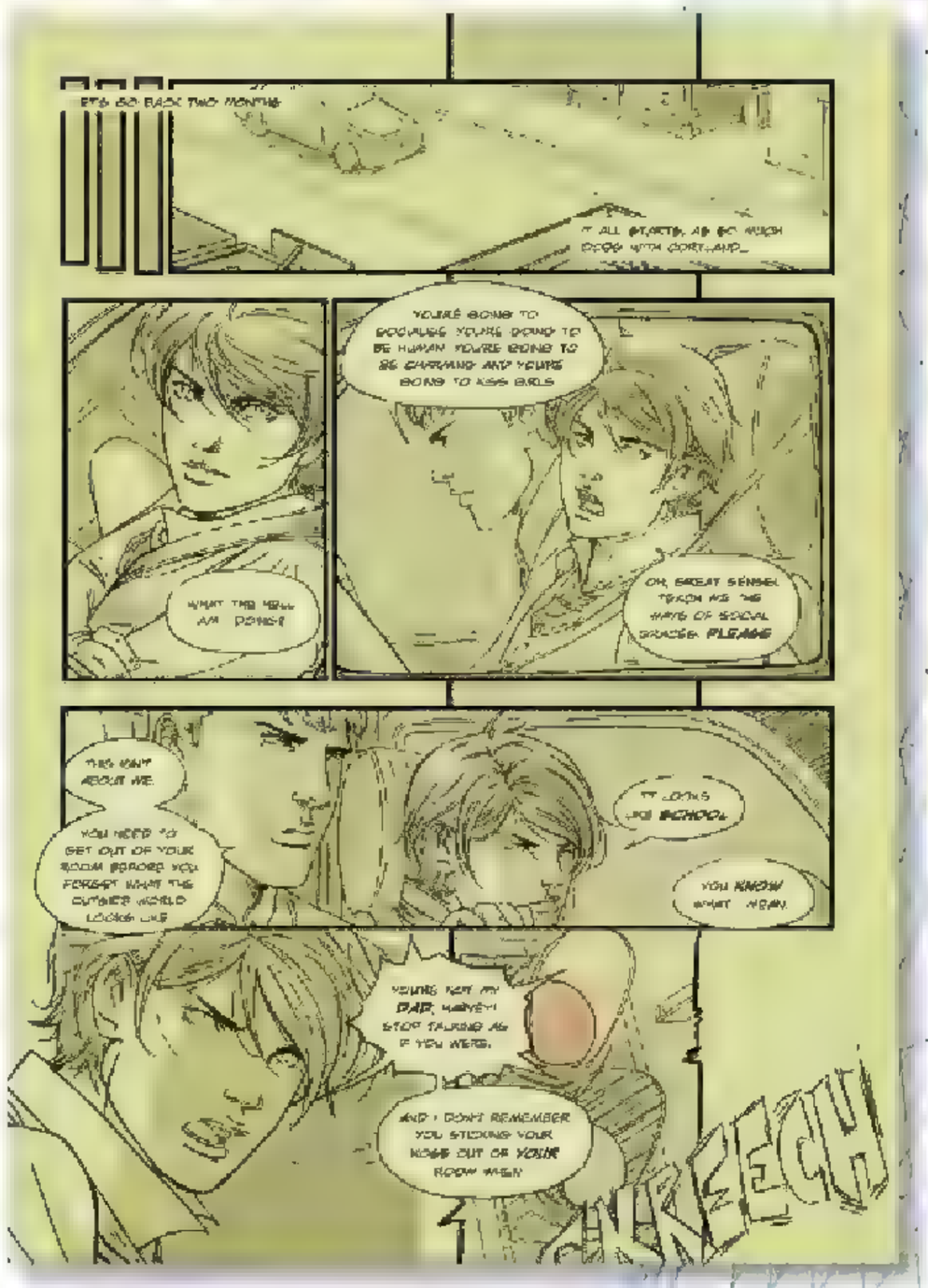
Emma Vieceli: "I entered a Tokyopop-run rising stars competition and my 15-page comic placed as a runner-up. But, more importantly, a nice man called Rob Valois was the editor of *Rising Stars* at the time. Neither of us would have guessed that, years down the line, he'd be working at Penguin, so when *Vampire Academy* was put on his desk, he asked if I'd be interested in drawing it. Penguin sent me the novels and once I started reading I couldn't stop. I love Leigh's scripts – I knew the books inside out, so I was able to leap in and play second fiddle at times, suggesting additions or alterations, and Leigh was always flexible and trusting. I wouldn't want the graphic novels to be the be all and end all – I'd want people to read the novels, but if you're after a way into the series then the graphic novels are very true to the books."

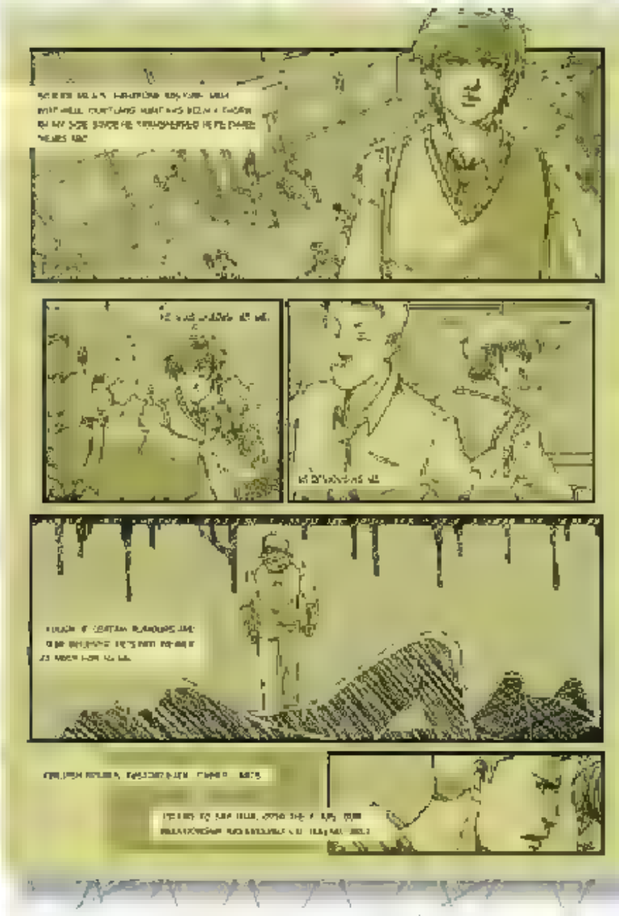
> **"My style is my style. I draw how I like to draw"**

CH: What has been the reaction to the series? Does *VA* sit outside the standard comics "mainstream" – are your readers *VA* fans or comic book fans, or both?

EV: "Lord knows what 'comics mainstream' means to different people these days, but it's been fascinating and awe-inspiring interacting with the *Vampire Academy* fandom, or the




IT'S BEEN ABOUT TWO MONTHS
IT ALL STARTED AS SO MUCH BOOKS WITH CORETHUNDER
YOU'RE GOING TO GRADUATE YOU'RE GOING TO BE HUMAN YOU'RE GOING TO BE CHARMING AND YOU'RE GOING TO KISS GIRLS
WHAT THE HELL AM DOING?
OH, GREAT SENSEI TAKON HE HE HAVE OF SOCIAL GRACES PLEASE
THIS WASN'T ABOUT ME.
IT LOOKS SO SCHOOL
YOU NEED TO GET OUT OF YOUR ROOM BROKE YOU FORGOT WHAT THE OUTSIDE WORLD LOOKS LIKE
YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN
YOU'RE NOT MY DAD, HARVEY! STOP TALKING AS IF YOU WERE.
AND I DON'T REMEMBER YOU STICKING YOUR NOSE OUT OF YOUR ROOM MUCH
SCREECH!



VA Family, as they're known. The series is firmly rooted in YA and genre fiction, and because of the straight-to-GN format, and the large book publisher, Penguin, it felt very far from my usual comics world. Most of the people contacting me were Richelle's readers, who were often new to comics, but amazingly excited about seeing a story they loved being adapted. They were and are so supportive and amazing. People waited in line for two hours to see me at New York Comic Con – most of them weren't there for comics at all, they were there for YA books in particular. And for me, which, frankly, blew me away. These were people who wouldn't probably be that interested in my guest slot for *Young Avengers*, that's just not their world – or at least, it's not a world that they can feel is theirs yet. By the same token, I was at a comic show once here in the UK and a guy picked up *Vampire Academy* and said, 'So, this is independent then?' and I had to bite my lip to stop me saying, 'Well, no. It's published by Penguin. It's a *NYT* bestselling graphic novel and about as far from independent as you can get.' But – again – it just wasn't his world."

CH: How do you think your more manga-influenced style has affected the reception of the books?

EV: "Honestly, it doesn't matter. I was relieved and overjoyed to spend three or four years on a title that was being read largely by an audience who didn't fixate on what the hell the style looked like, and more on character and story. The word 'manga' to mean a style is redundant in a time of cross-pollination and the collapse of house style. At its best it's unhelpful and regressive and, at its worst, it's damaging. My style is my style. I draw how I like to draw. If we like a comic, great; if we don't, fine. A piece of sequential storytelling appeals or doesn't appeal, on its own individual merits, and no umbrella label can ever – or should ever – dictate how we'll respond to something before we read it."

CH: Is it weird seeing characters you've been drawing in a film? How close to the whole thing do you feel as a creator?

EV: "News of the film was sort of crazy. And when the cast announcements started to filter out I was blown away. There was even a photo of Lucy Fry (Lissa) released where she was stood in the same pose I'd used for her character sheet years before. Producer Don Murphy and the crew have been pretty amazing. I don't consider myself close to being a big part of the film at all, but the team certainly did their best to make me feel connected and part of its extended family, and Richelle has been just amazing throughout. I love her! Meanwhile, the film still hasn't been released here in the UK – so – just like with the graphic novels – I find myself one of the last to see it! I can distract myself with my new projects, of course. I'm currently drawing the Alex Rider graphic novels for Walker Books, starting with *Scorpia*, adapted by the marvellous Antony Johnston and coloured by Kate Brown, these books will look super-slick and I'm really enjoying Alex as a character.

"I'm also working on a completely independent and Patreon-backed title in the form of *BREAKS*, a project I co-wrote and now draw with Malin Ryden. It's being released as a free-to-read webcomic with a view to printing straight-to-trade, and I've been over the moon to see some familiar *Vampire Academy* readers make the transition to my newer work, just as I was thrilled to see *Hamlet* or *Much Ado* readers make the jump to *VA*. I've always been a fan of breaking down boundaries and bringing the corners of comics closer together." CH

Top: *Frostbite* is the second in the hugely popular *VA* series. **Above:** Viecelli has described *BREAKS* as "a love story that's a bit broken"

***BREAKS* is free to read at www.breakscomic.com; *Vampire Academy: A Graphic Novel* 1-4 are out now.**

Out from under the Bat's wing

Kyle Higgins

After making a name for himself on DC's Bat books, Kyle Higgins is flying the coop to launch his first creator-owned series at Image

By Stephen Jewell

BORN ILLINOIS
HIGH NIGHTWING
NOW COWL
MORE TWITTER.COM/KYLEDHIGGINS

Higgins got his big break co-writing 2011's *Gates Of Gotham* miniseries with his good friend Scott Snyder and since then he's been mostly associated with the Dark Knight and his various costumed cohorts. The Chicago-born 28-year-old cites Dick Grayson as his favourite ever comic book character and he only wrapped up his two-and-half year run on *Nightwing* with last month's #29.

Now, along with becoming one of the regular scribes on the new weekly *Batman: Eternal*, Higgins is branching out into creator-owned territory with May's *COWL* at Image Comics. Drawn by former *Nightwing* colourist Rod Reis and co-written with his old film school buddy Alec Siegel, the historical superhero saga's gritty, urban milieu suggests that he hasn't actually put the spectre of the Caped Crusader very far behind him after all.

Comic Heroes: You've almost entirely worked for DC since entering the comic book industry so was embarking on a creator-owned project a natural next step for you?

Kyle Higgins: "I love writing *Nightwing* and *Batman* as they're the characters I grew up with. They inspired me to dream, although I never dreamed I'd be able to work on them. That said, as invested as I am in *Nightwing*, Dick Grayson doesn't belong to me. He's not my creation, and he's not a character I have carte blanche control over. At a certain point, as much as you love writing these characters, you start looking for something more. That's not to say I'm going to stop writing *Batman*, or any of the other books I'm doing, but I'm definitely making a concerted push to branch out and build my own worlds. And it's funny as Alec and I have wanted to make *COWL* for a long time, but if we'd put it out three years ago – before I worked n the Bat office – it wouldn't be the book it is now."

> **As invested as I am in Nightwing, Grayson doesn't belong to me**

CH: But even its title suggests that *COWL* owes a debt to Bats...

KH: "Actually, *COWL* – which stands for the Chicago Organised Workers League – was a late addition. The book is based on a film I directed in college called *The League*. But after we made the film, FX created the fantasy football show, which was also called *The League*. So every time I'd tell someone I directed *The League*, they'd get confused! We didn't want that to happen with this book and *COWL* is also a much better title. It's evocative and unique. I guess you could say it's influenced by Batman's cape and cowl as one of my favourite episodes of *Batman: The Animated Series* is "The Cape And Cowl Conspiracy", although that wasn't something I was thinking about when we came up with it. There's also a character in the film who's influenced by Dick Grayson. He won't be in the book right away, but I'm sure he'll turn up at some point."

CH: Why did you choose to set *COWL* in your hometown, Chicago, during the '60s?

KH: "Everything in comics is set in New York! That doesn't interest me. Also, Alec and I are both from Chicago so when we made the film, we wanted to focus on that. Additionally, since we lived there, it made getting establishing shots and visual effects plates much easier.

The other reason we picked Chicago comes from the time period. Labour unions in the 1960s, particularly in Chicago, were very interesting. The political machine in the city makes for a great backdrop to an organisation of superheroes."

CH: Tell us about the world of *COWL*...
KH: "It's a world I'm incredibly passionate about, and have been passionate about for a long time. It's a book that's as much a character study and political drama as it is a superhero piece. It's Jimmy Hoffa's *Mad Men* but with superheroes. The main character the Grey Raven – aka Geoffrey Warner – is one of the four founding members of COWL, along with Blaze, the Dart and Sparrow. Now, 13 years after starting the organisation, Geoffrey leads COWL from behind a desk. He's hung up the Grey Raven costume and instead wages political battles with Chicago. As the series goes, we'll watch Geoffrey grapple with how much he, COWL, and the times have all changed."

IN WHAT CITY HALL WAS OUT OF ANSWERS.
THIS WAS NOT THE FUTURE ANYONE PROMISED
WHAT OF ALL THE HEROES.
WATCH ME WHY--
THEY HAD TO COME HOME.
FOR THREE YEARS, THE GREY RAVEN, WHO BLAZE FOUGHT FOR CHICAGO
JUST LIKE THEY USED TO.
BUT IT WASN'T ENOUGH
NOT FOR THE GREY RAVEN.
BETTER HEROES FOR A BETTER CITY!
C.O.W.L. #1 HITS THIS MAY!
POW!

CH: How did Rod Reis become involved as artist?
KH: "Rod coloured the first 16 issues of *Nightwing* and we'd worked together for almost a year before we met at New York Comic Con in 2011. He did some small commissions during the show – in watercolours and markers – and they were amazing. We kept talking after that, and when Brian Buccellato asked me to write an eight-page story for his *Foster* anthology, I reached out to Rod about illustrating it. The story turned out to be awesome, and my next question was, 'How do you feel about the 1960s?'"

CH: Scott Snyder has played a big role in your career. Do you owe a lot to him?
KH: "Scott's definitely had a big impact for sure. He was a huge resource and ally on *Gates Of Gotham*, working with me to shape the story and giving me a ton of great advice about streamlining the narrative. We're very good friends. We talk a lot and bounce story ideas back and forth all the time. It sucks writing in a vacuum, especially if you get stuck, so having other writers you can talk to without fear of judgement is huge. We help each other so we both have footprints on the other's work in that way." CH

Above left: Higgins and Snyder made the city the star in 2011's *Gates Of Gotham* miniseries.
Above: A real-life city, Chicago, makes the perfect backdrop for a firm of superheroes in *COWL*

***COWL* is published by Image Comics in May. *Batman: Eternal* is out now through DC Comics.**

Golden boy

James Robinson

After sprinkling his stardust on *Starman* in the 1990s, James Robinson is bringing his magic touch to the House of Ideas

By Stephen Jewell

BORN MANCHESTER, UK
HIGH STARMAN
NOW THE INVADERS
MORE @JamesDRobinson

He's renowned for his ability to breathe new life into vintage properties such as the long-running *Starman* and *The Golden Age* but James Robinson has mostly been associated with DC over the past three decades. After his abrupt departure from the New 52's parallel universe title *Earth Two*, though, the San Francisco-based Brit has fetched up at the House of Ideas. His previous Marvel work consisted of a handful of titles in the mid '90s – most notably a seven-issue run on *Cable* and four issues of *Generation X* – so he now finds himself in fertile, mostly new territory.

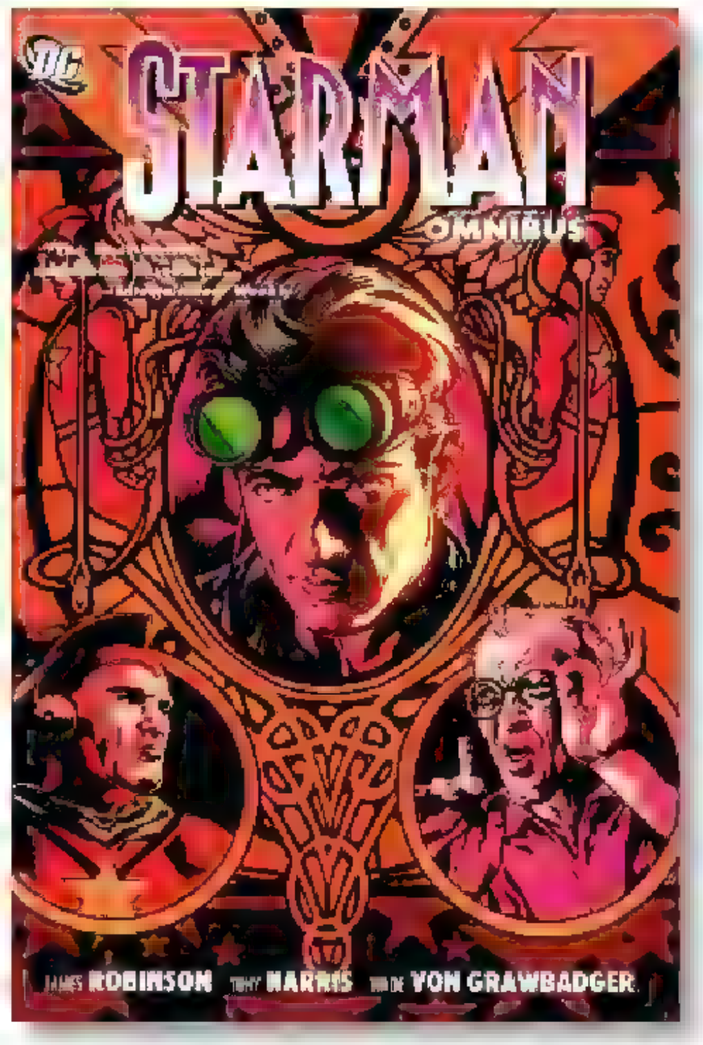
Given the opportunity to reinvent World War 2 superteam *The Invaders* in tandem with erstwhile *Animal Man* artist Steve Pugh, Robinson has chosen to shoot them into space instead of further exploring their historical roots. And having taken over the reins of *Fantastic Four* alongside penciller Leonard Kirk, his dramatic stint promises no less than the fall of Marvel's First Family. "I never really felt like I was part of the Marvel world before in the way that other writers have been," he says. "So what I'm doing now doesn't feel like a return so much as a fresh start and I'm enjoying it very much."

Comic Heroes: Nobody was expecting you to turn *The Invaders* into an intergalactic epic. How did you come to embark on such a bold new direction?

James Robinson: "When I originally talked to Marvel last year, *The Invaders* was the first thing that they suggested. I could certainly see why they would offer me that as I'm known as this guy who does Golden Age books. I've been following and enjoying all the versions of *The Invaders* but I felt like I'd read every single *Invaders* story featuring Baron Strucker, HYDRA or any other of those old tropes that we've seen them fight. I wanted to keep them together and to come up with a sense of who they were as a team but also create new foes.

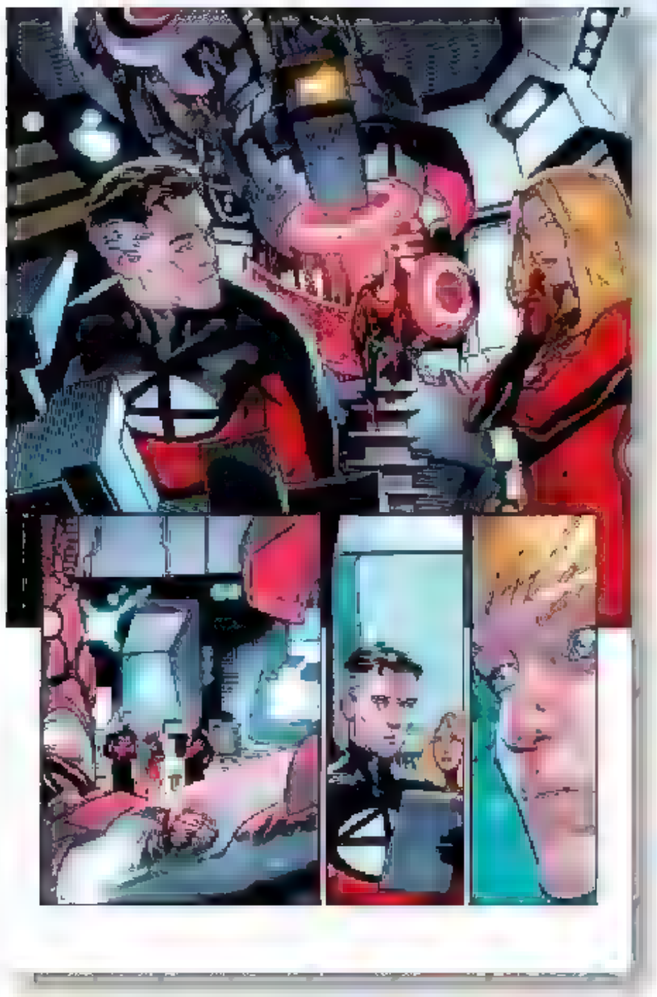
"There's this whole simmering cauldron of Namor fans out there"

"It occurred to me that the modern-day Marvel Universe is constantly being invaded: there's been Secret Invasion, Mole Man appearing out of the Earth's core with monsters and Annihilus invading from the Negative Zone. So by having that as the backdrop as the characters face these menaces, the question becomes, 'Who are the Invaders?' In the original book, it was them invading Europe as they were fighting the Nazis and in the first arc in this book it's them taking on the Kree and ultimately deciding that to save Namor, they have to invade Hala, the Kree homeworld."



CH: With original Human Torch Jim Hammond and the Winter Soldier amongst their ranks, the Invaders are now radically different characters to their initial 1940s incarnations...

JR: "That's the fun of it. They've all changed. I never really felt like Jim Hammond had much of a personality – previously people haven't known what to do with him. He's been constantly depowered and pushed to the sidelines, so I've tried to make him feel more like a real person. With the Winter Soldier, you get to see that there's still a little piece of him that is the boy superhero that was Bucky, but all the stuff that he's been through since has



really changed him. So doing the dialogue for someone who has both sides like that has been a challenge. As for the rest of the team, I've actually written Captain America a few times before, while Namor has been the one that I just want to get right. There's this whole simmering cauldron of Namor fans out there, who just love him and this is me giving them the best Namor I can."

CH: You've got a reputation for bringing back obscure characters – Major Liberty appeared in *Invaders* #1. Do you have any other rare gems up your sleeve?

JR: "By far the character that most people want to see is Union Jack and you'll see a little bit of him in #6 and #7. And then the next arc – which is basically HG Wells's *Martians* – goes huge on Union Jack *and* Namor. The story starts out in London in 1970 and it's got the original Union Jack and the Freedom Five, who appeared in one panel of *Invaders* as the World War 1 superteam. So if you've ever wondered what it'd be like to see the Phantom Eagle strafing an HG Wells Martian walking craft, you're going to find out."

CH: With Fantastic Four, did you want to re-establish the FF as a focal point of the Marvel Universe?

JR: "They've always been front and centre of the Marvel Universe but lately it just seems like they've very much been off and away from everything. In Jonathan Hickman's run, so much of it took place in other realities and there was a lot of concentration on Nathan Richards, the children grown-up and future versions. Then in Matt Fraction's run, they left for a year. I just felt like it was time to bring them back to Manhattan for a while and have them deal with life in the Marvel Universe, although there's some huge cosmic stuff that I'm also gearing up for. I just wanted to bring them back to New York to press the reset button."

CH: Sounds like they're in for a really harrowing time...

JR: "It's basically about the fall and rise of Johnny Storm because he loses his powers early on. So you'll see what a hero and a brave man he really is when he no longer has his flames or the FF to help him. He has to rise to the occasion and become a better man. So it's actually a journey of real triumph for him. But at the same time, he's Johnny so he had that confidence and that smile.

"The other thing that I'm trying to do – which I'm borrowing from *Starman* and also doing in *Invaders* – is to have these emotional beats, where all the stuff that I've been planning will pay off. And everyone, from all the kids to Doctor Doom, will have their moment in the big picture as the story unfolds. I'm very happy to slowly begin to make that happen."

Above: Robinson is breathing new life into *The Invaders* and putting the FF right back at the heart of the Marvel U

***The Invaders* and *Fantastic Four* are both out now.**

X-O marks the spot

Robert Venditti

As he prepares to celebrate Aric of Dacia's quarter-century milestone, Robert Venditti talks about taking charge of Valiant's first ever summer event series

By Stephen Jewell

BORN HOLLYWOOD, USA
HIGH THE SURROGATES
NOW ARMOR HUNTERS
MORE www.robertvenditti.com

It's not often that a comics creator gets to launch an entire superhero line from the ground up. But that was the opportunity that was presented to Robert Venditti when he was asked to helm the fledgling Valiant Entertainment's inaugural title, *X-O Manowar*, in May 2012. Since then, both the rapidly burgeoning Valiant-verse (based on former Acclaim characters from the early 1990s) and the Atlanta-based scribe have gone from strength to strength.

Having made his name with his creator-owned Top Shelf sci-fi crime series *The Surrogates* – which was made into a Hollywood blockbuster starring Bruce Willis in 2009 – Venditti made his first foray into monthly assignments with *X-O Manowar*. Two years on, he has not only added DC's *Green Lantern* and *Green Lantern Corp* to his bow, he is now set to pen his first ever event book in the form of June's *Armor Hunters* four-parter. And there's also the no-small matter of May's *X-O Manowar* #25 double-sized anniversary extravaganza, which will also boast contributions from the likes of Bryan Hitch, Terry Dodson and JG Jones

Comic Heroes: You were tasked with kicking off the Valiant-verse with *X-O Manowar*. Was that a daunting prospect?
Robert Venditti: "It was a lot of weight to put on one title's shoulders. For one month, the entire line was just *X-O Manowar*. But it all worked out, although for a multitude of reasons, it could just as easily have not, so I was very relieved, to say the least."

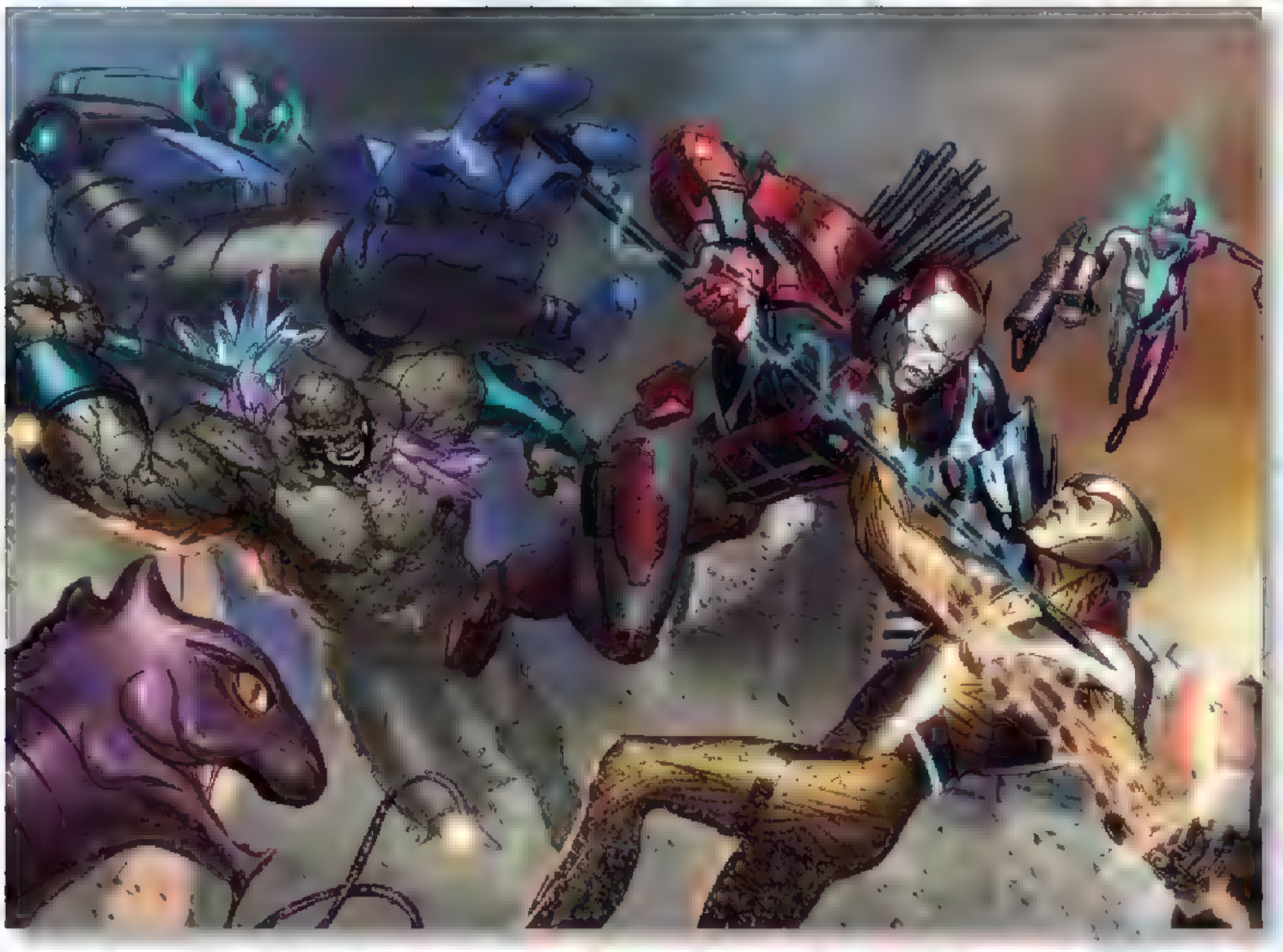
CH: As an ancient warrior in a futuristic alien suit of armour, X-O Manowar is a very different protagonist to the likes of Captain America and Batman. What first drew you to him?
RV: "It'll be three years in June since I started working on my pitch for the series and what interested me in him then is what continues to interest me today, and that's the main character, Aric of Dacia. The idea of a time-displaced Visigoth trying to find his way in the modern world is so ripe with conflict and storytelling possibilities.

"It's also allowed me to explore the concept of heroism and how it changes over time. Throughout the series, Aric has behaved as a hero would in the 5th century, but in the 21st century that behaviour is seen as almost villainous. I find that fascinating."

> **X-O Manowar would win a fight with Iron Man, hands down!**

CH: Aric was originally co-created by veteran *Iron Man* artist Bob Layton, so do you think he has much in common with Tony Stark?
RV: "If you're asking who would win in a fight between them, the answer is X-O Manowar, hands down! Tony Stark is a smart guy, and he has deep pockets, but no one would ever claim that the Iron Man armour is the most powerful weapon in the universe. The Manowar armour is on an entirely different level."

CH: *Armor Hunters* is your first venture into line-wide crossover territory...
RV: "It's a new challenge for me which is always what draws me to a project. As risk averse as I am in my daily life, for some reason as a writer I'm compelled to chase the riskiest jobs available so I guess I'm riddled with



paradox. But it was just something that grew organically out of what we've been doing all along in *X-O Manowar*. The story presented itself, and now we're going to tell it."

CH: Apart from *X-O Manowar*, will *Armor Hunters* tie in with Valiant's other titles such as its team book *Unity*?
RV: "I'll confirm that *Unity* and *X-O Manowar* will be involved, but beyond that, I don't want to say. There'll definitely be more titles taking part, though. I will say that Valiant has always had a great writers' room atmosphere, and working with the rest of the group is a real benefit and the stories are better because of it. As for what else to expect from the book, the answer is a lot as there'll be plenty of revelations and also some entirely new concepts and characters. It's the largest, most sweeping story X-O Manowar has been a part of to date."

CH: Does it involve the titular hunters coming to Earth to claim the armour?
RV: "Actually, they don't want to claim the armour at all; they want to destroy it. Much of *X-O Manowar* to date has centred on everyone wanting the armour. Aric wanted it, the Vine wanted it back, Unity wanted it, and then Harada took it from Unity. Everyone thinks that the person wearing the armour is the most powerful, but we'll come to learn that inside the armour is the absolute last place you want to be."

CH: *Armor Hunters* is illustrated by the British artist Doug Braithwaite, who recently did some great work on *Unity*. Have you been impressed by his efforts?
RV: "Doug sent over the first five pages of *Armor Hunters* #1 and I stared at them for the entire afternoon. This is a supremely challenging story in terms of the cast and concept but he communicates everything to the page so beautifully. The storytelling is there and the emotion is there. He somehow managed to draw a character with no facial features in a way that you know exactly what that character's personality is. It's remarkable!"

Above: Verdugo has swapped the sci-fi tale of *The Surrogates* for the world of Visigoth warrior Aric of Dacia in *X-O Manowar* and its summer event *Armor Hunters*

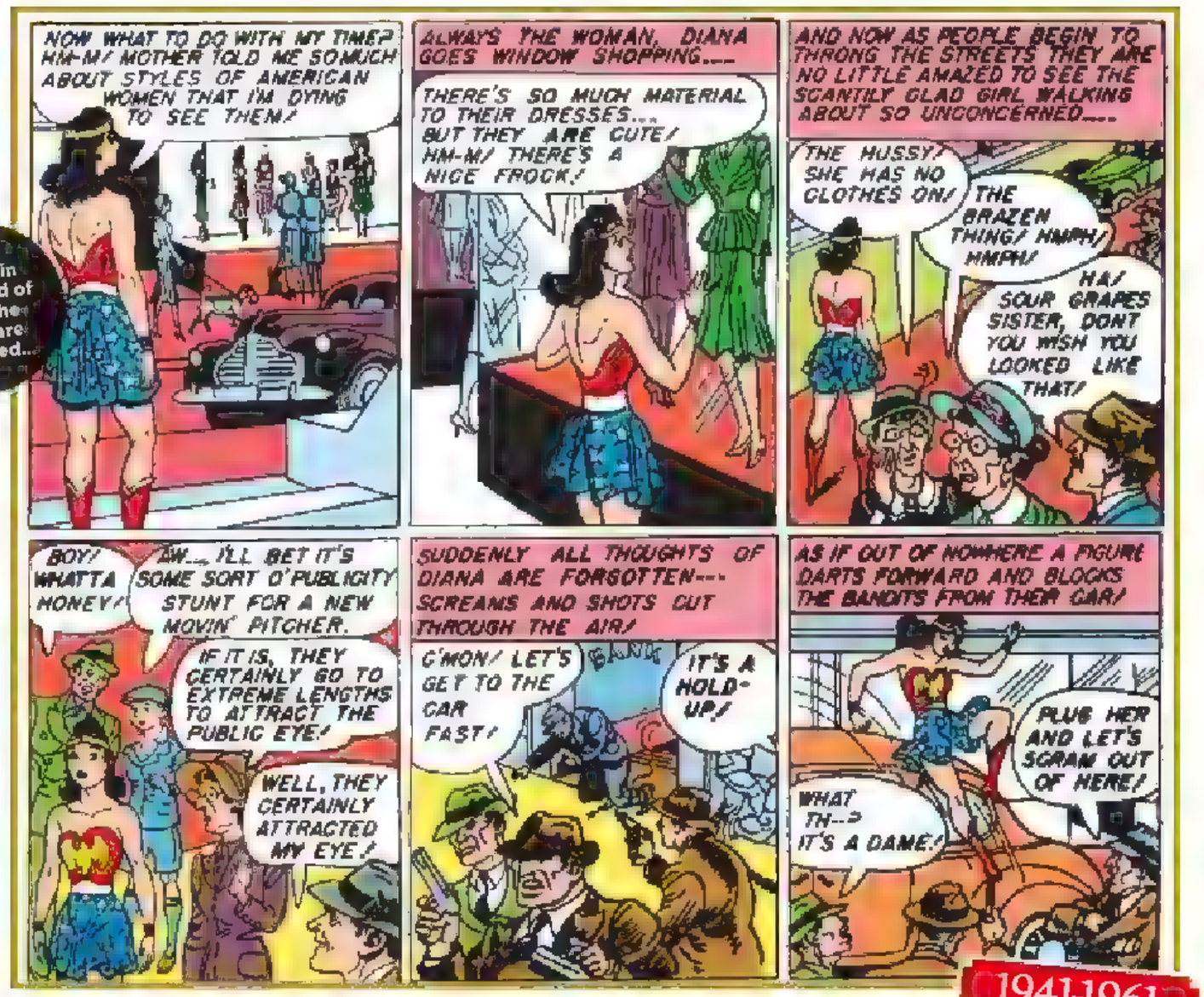
CH: It's been three years since your last creator-owned book, *The Homeland Directive*. Do you hope to return to some more personal projects?
RV: "I haven't published any creator-owned comics in a while, but that's because I'm writing a pair of novels for Simon & Schuster's Young Readers imprint and the first one, *Miles Taylor And The Golden Cape; The Attack Of The Alien Horde*, will be out in May 2015. Beyond that, I do have plans for more creator-owned comics as well, which includes a return to the world of *The Surrogates*. There so much I still want to do." CH

***Armor Hunters* begins with a special zero issue story in *X-O Manowar* #25 in May; the miniseries starts in June.**

WONDER WOMAN

From her bizarre "lesbian recruitment poster" origins to the modern, neck-snapping warrior princess, Wonder Woman's potent brew makes her one of the most fascinating figures in comics reckons **Matt Bielby**

NO.1 JANUARY
The newest of the DC magazines!
SENSATION COMICS
10¢
Featuring THE SENSATIONAL NEW ADVENTURE STRIP CHARACTER- Wonder Woman!
Diana arrives in the world of men: the locals are perplexed...


NOW WHAT TO DO WITH MY TIME? HM-M/ MOTHER TOLD ME SO MUCH ABOUT STYLES OF AMERICAN WOMEN THAT I'M DYING TO SEE THEM!
ALWAYS THE WOMAN, DIANA GOES WINDOW SHOPPING....
THERE'S SO MUCH MATERIAL TO THEIR DRESSES... BUT THEY ARE CUTE/ HM-M/ THERE'S A NICE FROCK!
AND NOW AS PEOPLE BEGIN TO THRONG THE STREETS THEY ARE NO LITTLE AMAZED TO SEE THE SCANTILY CLAD GIRL WALKING ABOUT SO UNCONCERNED.....
THE HUSSY! SHE HAS NO CLOTHES ON!
THE BRAZEN THING! HMPH! HMPH!
HA! SOUR GRAPES SISTER, DON'T YOU WISH YOU LOOKED LIKE THAT!
BOY! WHATTA HONEY!
AW... I'LL BET IT'S SOME SORT O' PUBLICITY STUNT FOR A NEW MOVIN' PITCHER.
IF IT IS, THEY CERTAINLY GO TO EXTREME LENGTHS TO ATTRACT THE PUBLIC EYE!
WELL, THEY CERTAINLY ATTRACTED MY EYE!
SUDDENLY ALL THOUGHTS OF DIANA ARE FORGOTTEN--- SCREAMS AND SHOTS CUT THROUGH THE AIR!
C'MON! LET'S GET TO THE CAR FAST!
BANK
IT'S A HOLD-UP!
AS IF OUT OF NOWHERE A FIGURE DARTS FORWARD AND BLOCKS THE BANDITS FROM THEIR CAR!
PLUG HER AND LET'S SCRAM OUT OF HERE!
WHAT TH--? IT'S A DAME!

All images © DC

1941-1961

AMAZING AMAZON

There are few comic book heroes as intriguing as Wonder Woman, the first important female superhero, and certainly the most enduring. If we ignore the briefest of mid-'80s hiatuses, she's been in continuous publication since early 1942, and a stalwart of DC's most prominent superteams for almost as long.

On top of that, Wonder Woman is the only woman in comics with name recognition to rival that of Batman and Superman, the male heroes she's most often grouped with as part of DC's "Trinity" of core characters. And although confused (and often clueless) creators have messed with her powers and personality enough over the decades to make it sometimes hard to say exactly who Wonder Woman is, certain traits have endured – and everyone, comic book reader or not, knows what they are.

The lasso, the bracelets, the stars-and-stripes outfit – they're icons as powerful as any to be found in fiction, giving Wonder Woman a visual punch to rival the rich, confusing stew of issues she's come to symbolise. But more than this, it's Wonder Woman's seemingly contradictory approach to crime fighting that makes her one of the most unusual, most admirable, most multi-faceted of heroes.

You see, at times Diana of Themyscira, Princess of Amazons, is shown to be as violent as Wolverine – willing to kill where other long-underwear types will not. Equally often she's shown to be as patriotic as Superman, with a similar immigrant's idealistic regard for America; perhaps more of one, in fact, as even he doesn't wear the flag on his perfectly formed rump. Plus, she's almost constantly pressed into service as a feminist icon, giving her a real-world political weight and meaning no other superhero can match. An unbreakable regard for women, their lives and their struggles, is a theme that's been front-and-centre in *Wonder Woman* comics from the beginning, and from the '70s onwards her image was co-opted in dramatic fashion by the feminist movement too, giving Diana another life well outside of DC's control. In the right context, the image of Wonder Woman holds power in a way Batman or Superman never could.

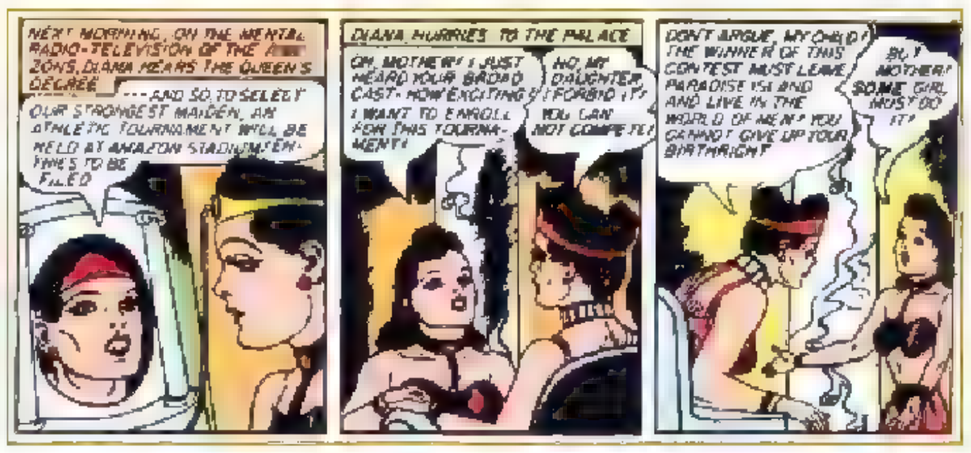
But more than this heady mix of the warrior and the progressive, the creature of the past – for Diana is a mythological figure of sorts – fighting for a better future, what really makes Wonder Woman unique is her commitment to love.

Alone amongst the major superheroes, she exhibits an unshakable commitment to more than just bringing wrong-doers to justice; she's out to rehabilitate them too. Wonder Woman seems to genuinely care for her foes, and goes out of her way to resolve their issues, remove them from malign influence, show them a better way.

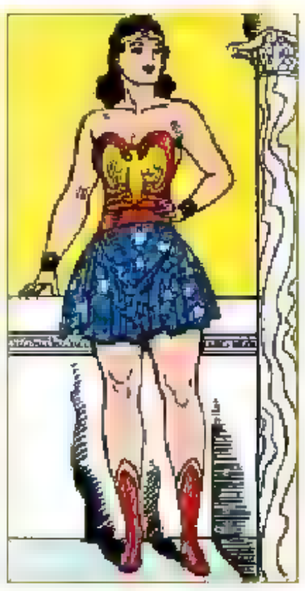
Next to the long-term commitment of Wonder Woman, the darkest of knights and steeliest of men start to look like violent, half-hearted little boys. Can she really be the only one who's properly thought this thing through?

GREAT HERA!

So who is this lass, and where did she come from? Wonder Woman certainly has the most peculiar backstory. She was


NEXT MORNING, ON THE MENTAL RADIO-TELEVISION OF THE AMAZONS, DIANA HEARS THE QUEEN'S DECREE
---AND SO TO SELECT OUR STRONGEST MAIDEN, AN ATHLETIC TOURNAMENT WILL BE HELD AT AMAZON STADIUM! ENTRIES TO BE FILED
DIANA HURRIES TO THE PALACE
OH, MOTHER! I JUST HEARD YOUR BROADCAST- HOW EXCITING! I WANT TO ENROLL FOR THIS TOURNAMENT!
NO, MY DAUGHTER, I FORBID IT! YOU CAN NOT COMPETE!
DON'T ARGUE, MY CHILD! THE WINNER OF THIS CONTEST MUST LEAVE PARADISE ISLAND AND LIVE IN THE WORLD OF MEN! YOU CANNOT GIVE UP YOUR BIRTHRIGHT
BUT MOTHER! SOME GIRL MUST DO IT!

Above: After her debut in *All Star Comics* #8 n 1942, Wonder Woman was promoted to the ead in new antho ogy title *Sensation Comics*

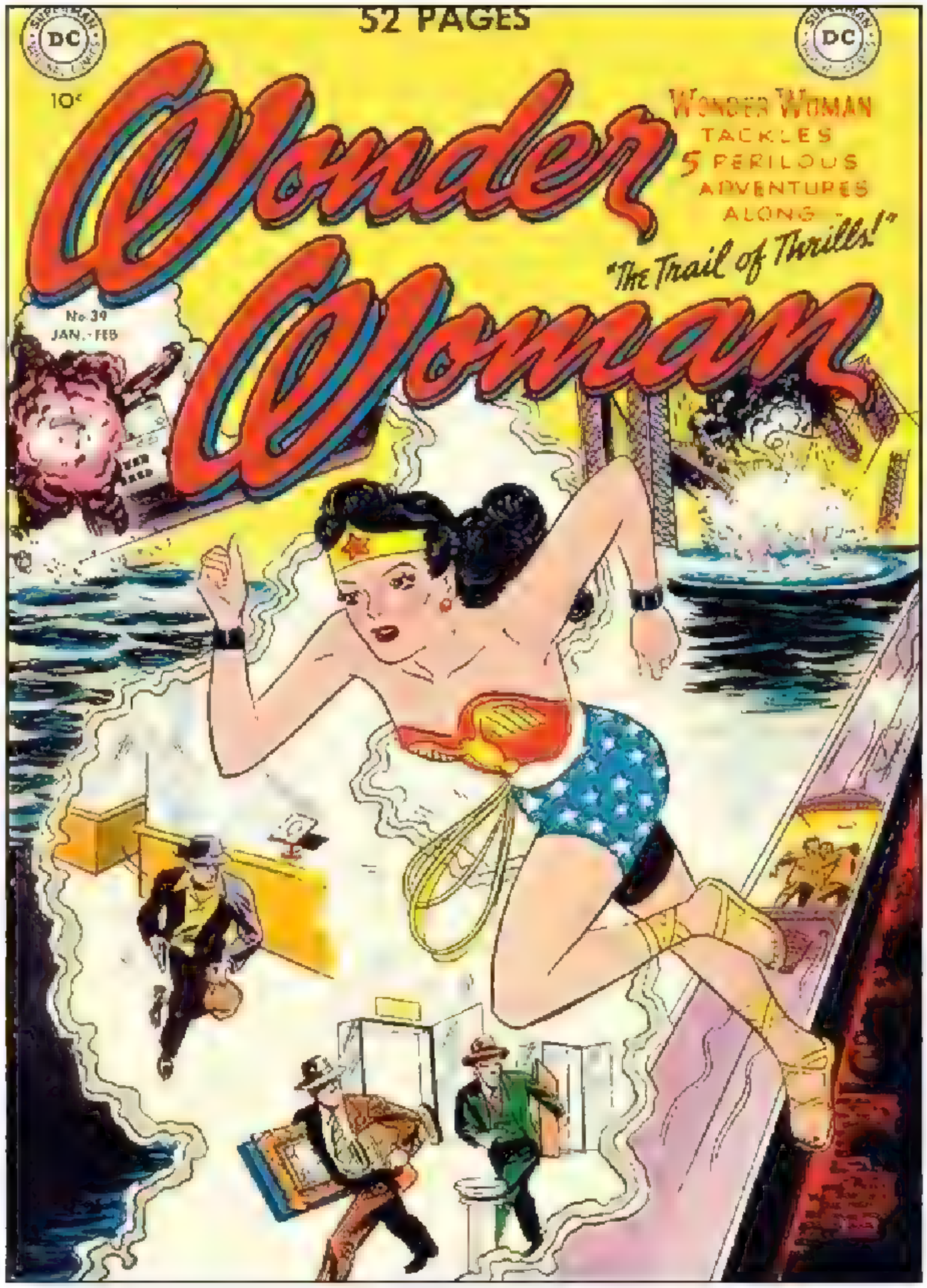


created by William Moulton Marston, a psychologist and (amongst other things) "free love" enthusiast fascinated with the female psyche. Her early adventures are similar to those of her contemporaries (Superman first appeared three years before she did, and Batman two) in that they're full of life and invention, yet often play fast and loose with credibility and common sense.

In other ways, however, they're very different, not least in that *Wonder Woman* regularly heaved with fetishistic details and sexual overtones almost entirely absent from the lives of the other heroes (Bruce and Dick sharing a bedroom in *Batman* aside). Early *Wonder Woman* is packed with phallic symbols and "bondage games" – to the extent that, when Fredric Wertham would call her "a veritable lesbian recruitment poster" in his notorious 1954 book *The Seduction Of The Innocent*, it wasn't hard to see what he meant.

Marston was a celebrated academic who'd taught at Columbia, Tufts and Radcliffe, and had invented the lie detector – he'd gleefully demonstrate it »

AND AT THE CONTROLS IS AN AMAZON MAIDEN, HAVED DIANA OF HER MOTHER, QUEEN OF THE AMAZONS, AFTER HER GODMOTHER GODDESS OF THE MOON!
HE'S STIRRING! PERHAPS I'D BETTER REMOVE HIS BANDAGES!
OH-H-H!
WHERE--? I'M IN HEAVEN! THERE'S AN ANGEL SMILING AT ME--- A BEAUTIFUL ANGEL!
HE'S FAINTED! HE'S STILL VERY WEAK. HE CALLED ME AN ANGEL--- A BEAUTIFUL ANGEL. THAT'S THE FIRST TIME A MAN EVER CALLED ME-- BEAUTIFUL!
ON--- ON SPEEDS THE PLANE UNTIL IT REACHES ITS DESTINATION— WASHINGTON, D.C.!
AT LAST I'M HERE— IN THE CAPITAL OF THE UNITED STATES!
DIANA BRINGS THE TRANSPARENT PLANE DOWN ON AN ABANDONED FIELD ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF WASHINGTON.
THIS DESERTED FARM SHOULD DO NICELY AS A HIDEOUT FOR MY PLANE!
PICKING UP STEVE TREVOR, SHE RACES SWIFTLY TO THE WALTER REED HOSPITAL.
GOOD THING IT IS STILL VERY EARLY IN THE MORNING SO THE STREETS ARE DESERTED.
AND INSIDE---
THIS IS CAPTAIN STEVE TREVOR OF THE ARMY INTELLIGENCE! HE'S HAD A BRAIN CONCUSSION! SEE THAT HE'S TAKEN CARE OF!
WHO—WHAT?
BUT- BUT WAIT! WHO ARE YOU?
I'LL SEND YOU A FULL REPORT SOMETIME! BYE!



Above: The Invisib e Plane was WW's pre-*Crisis* fly ng machine, before she developed the ability to ride w nd currents
Right: This Golden Age Wonder Woman sports shorts and practica Gladiator sandals

THE MAGIC LASSO CARRIES APHRODITE'S POWER TO MAKE MEN AND WOMEN SUBMIT TO YOUR WILL! WHOMEVER YOU BIND WITH THIS LASSO MUST OBEY YOU!
OBEY ME... BUT WHO THE H-WHAT?

on visitors to his house – but he was also a pop psychologist with a high media profile. He'd written numerous works of historical fiction, usually set in ancient Greece or Rome, and tons of self-help articles with titles like "Obey That Impulse" and "Take Your Profits From Defeat", many of which echoed the themes of *Wonder Woman* long before he came up with Princess Diana and her giggly, Sapphic-tinged life on Paradise Island. One had been called "The Natural Superiority Of Women", and Marston's early feminist beliefs – he felt it only right and proper that a woman should be US President one day – provided a clear, dramatic theme that Wonder Woman's adventures set out to explore.

No great fan of the comics, Marston had actually campaigned against the infant medium, decrying its violence, its emphasis on criminality, and what he'd later call a "blood curdling masculinity", wherein women were mere decoration, trophies to be scrapped over by men – when they showed up at all.

All-American publisher MC Gaines (the company would soon be one of three that came together to form DC) had spotted one of these pieces and, doubtless a tad cynically, had figured Marston might be persuaded to shut up if invited to join the new "advisory board" of educators created to nominally supervise his output. They met at New York's Harvard Club in 1941, and an agreement was swiftly reached – initially Marston would come up with ways in which Gaines could make comic books more psychologically beneficial to young readers, but soon he was lobbying to be allowed to create a new series too, one designed to sum up his views on the relationship between the sexes, and in doing so offer a counterweight to what he saw as a tidal wave of brutal male heroes.

"It's too bad for us literary enthusiasts," Marston would write, "but it's the truth nevertheless – pictures tell any story more effectively than words." Perhaps comics – so disappointing and potentially corrupting – could be rebuilt, he decided, turning superhero fantasies into something that might actually be good for the kids. "Feeling big, smart, important and winning the admiration of their fellows are realistic rewards all children strive for," he said. "It remains for moral educators to decide what type of behaviour is to be regarded as heroic."

SHADES OF PLUTO!

Marston – initially worried about putting his name to such low art, and so using the pseudonym "Charles Moulton" – created Wonder Woman with artist Harry George Peter and his four assistants; Peter was a newspaper humour illustrator in his early sixties who'd not worked on superheroes before, but his oddball style would prove invaluable. Marston had apparently picked him because he knew what "life is all about".

Their creation debuted as a mystery figure in the anthology title *All Star Comics*, home of the Flash, Hawkman and others – "She is known only as Wonder Woman, but who she is, or whence she came, nobody knows!" – but Marston had actually already cooked up one of the most elaborate origins in comics for her.

Diana's first eight-page adventure in *All Star* #8 (January 1942) would set the stage for 70 years of adventure. It told of a mysterious hidden Utopia, Paradise Island, populated entirely by enlightened women where Princess Diana and her pal witness a plane crash, and rush to help.

These are the legendary Amazons of Greek myth, part historical and a larger

"Dramatic, intriguing, and somewhat incoherent, the strip was an immediate hit"

52 BIG PAGES
SUPERMAN DC NATIONAL COMICS
NO.48
JULY AUG.
10c
Wonder Woman
THE AMAZON PRINCESS MEETS HER DEADLIEST RIVAL IN AN AMAZING DUEL "WONDER WOMAN VS. ROBOT WOMAN!"

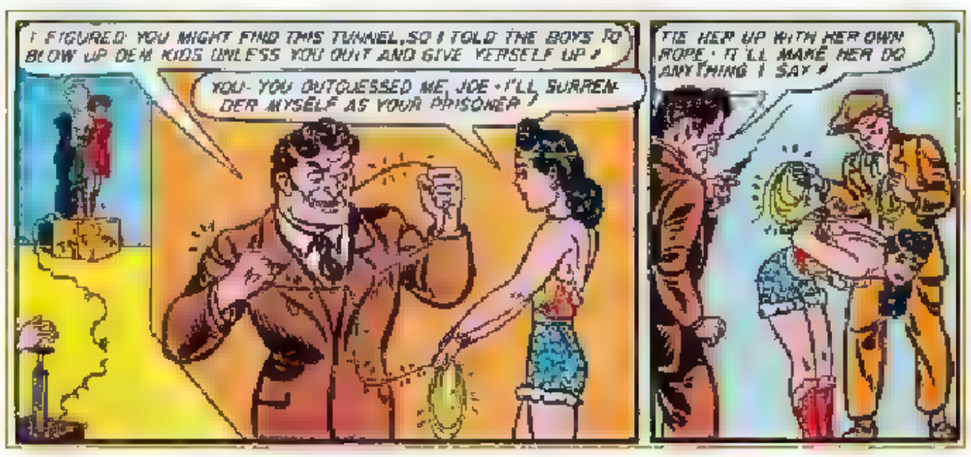
2 NEW FEATURES "ROMANCE INC." AND "DR. ANT"
Sensation COMICS
The UNMASKING of WONDER WOMAN!
52 PAGES
10¢
I THOUGHT SO! YOUR SECRET IS OUT, DIANA PRINCE! WITHOUT YOUR GLASSES, YOU ARE WONDER WOMAN!

Above: Give that boy a medal! Wonder Woman is unmasked in *Sensation Comics* #95
Left: Diana battles a robot version of herself in *Wonder Woman* #48

part pure fantasy, and men are unknown in their world – until now. The chap they rescue, a US Army intelligence officer called Steve Trevor, is saved from almost certain death by superior Amazon medical tech, leaving their ruler, Queen Hippolyta, with a problem. Steve needs to be returned to the outside world, and the ancient Greek goddesses – whom the Amazons still worship – order her to send a champion with him, a powerful woman to join the fight for freedom that's tearing apart "Man's World". She's to battle for "America, the last citadel of democracy, and of equal rights for women." (Though, actually, Marston's attitude towards Wonder Woman's new home seems mixed – one minute he's praising the USA wholeheartedly, the next he's slamming it on gender issues.)

Soon various Amazons – immortals who dress like Roman-themed showgirls – are competing for the honour in a series of athletic events, but none can stand against a mysterious, masked figure – soon revealed, of course, to be a disguised Diana. She's won her chance, and is rewarded with a new costume, one incorporating the stars and eagle of her new nation. ("Why mother, it's lovely," Diana grins – though she'd soon replace the initial skirt with a more practical shorts-cum-swimsuit affair.) Now she'll fly to the USA – in an invisible plane, for these ancient world chicks seem pretty special at sci-fi invention – as Wonder Woman.

Dramatic, intriguing, and somewhat incoherent, the initial *Wonder Woman* strip was an immediate hit, and our heroine soon graduated to the lead story in a new anthology title, *Sensation Comics*. It was here that we first learned that her secret identity would be Diana Prince – and, by the summer of 1942, she was headlining her own book too. Before long she'd return to *All Star Comics* as the only female member of the Justice Society of America, the first real superhero team – though, embarrassingly, she was relegated to a secretarial role in many early JSA tales, despite selling more comics than any of the individual male members.

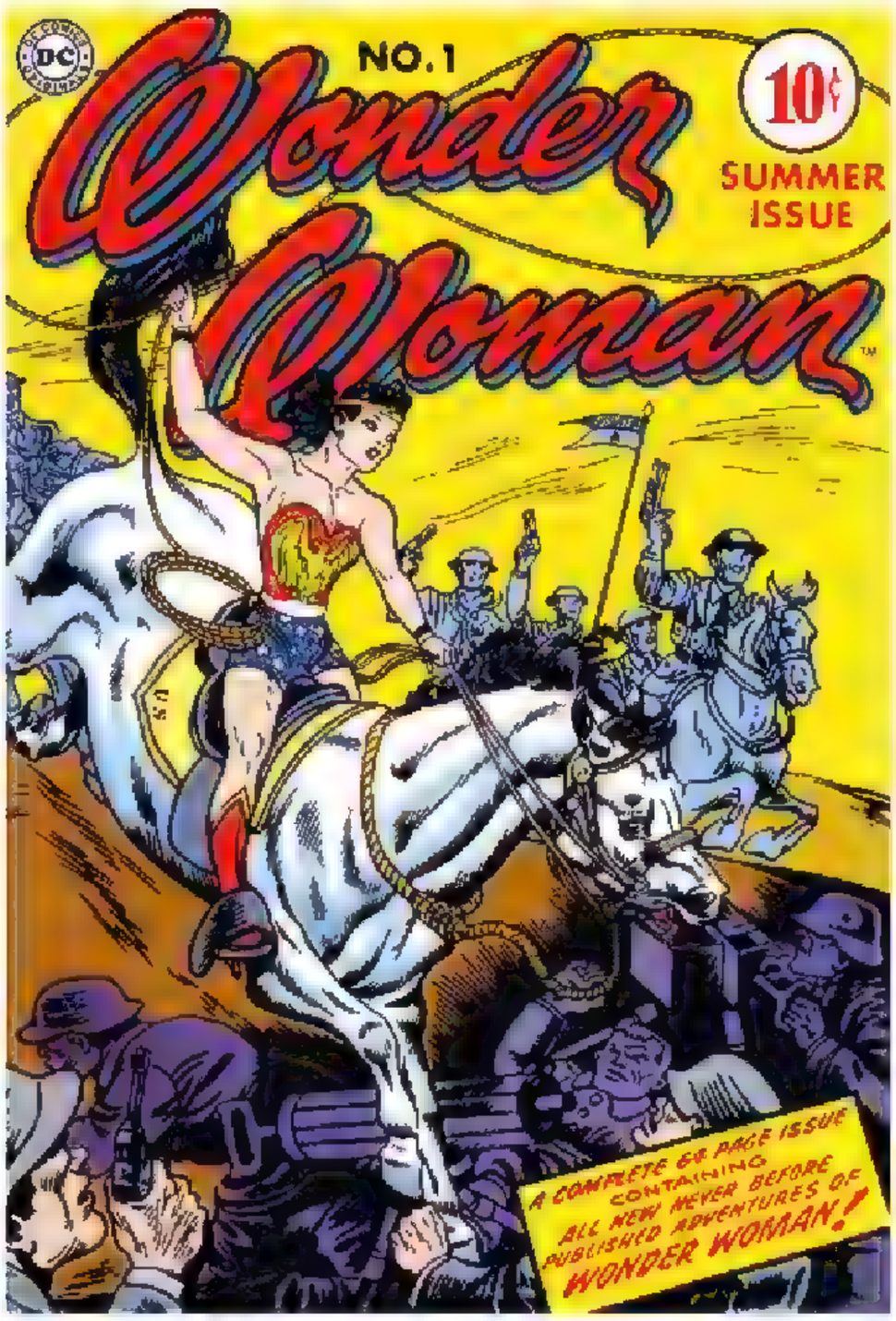

I FIGURED YOU MIGHT FIND THIS TUNNEL, SO I TOLD THE BOYS TO BLOW UP DEM KIDS UNLESS YOU QUIT AND GIVE YERSELF UP!
YOU- YOU OUTGUESSED ME, JOE - I'LL SURRENDER MYSELF AS YOUR PRISONER!
TIE HER UP WITH HER OWN ROPE - IT'LL MAKE HER DO ANYTHING I SAY!

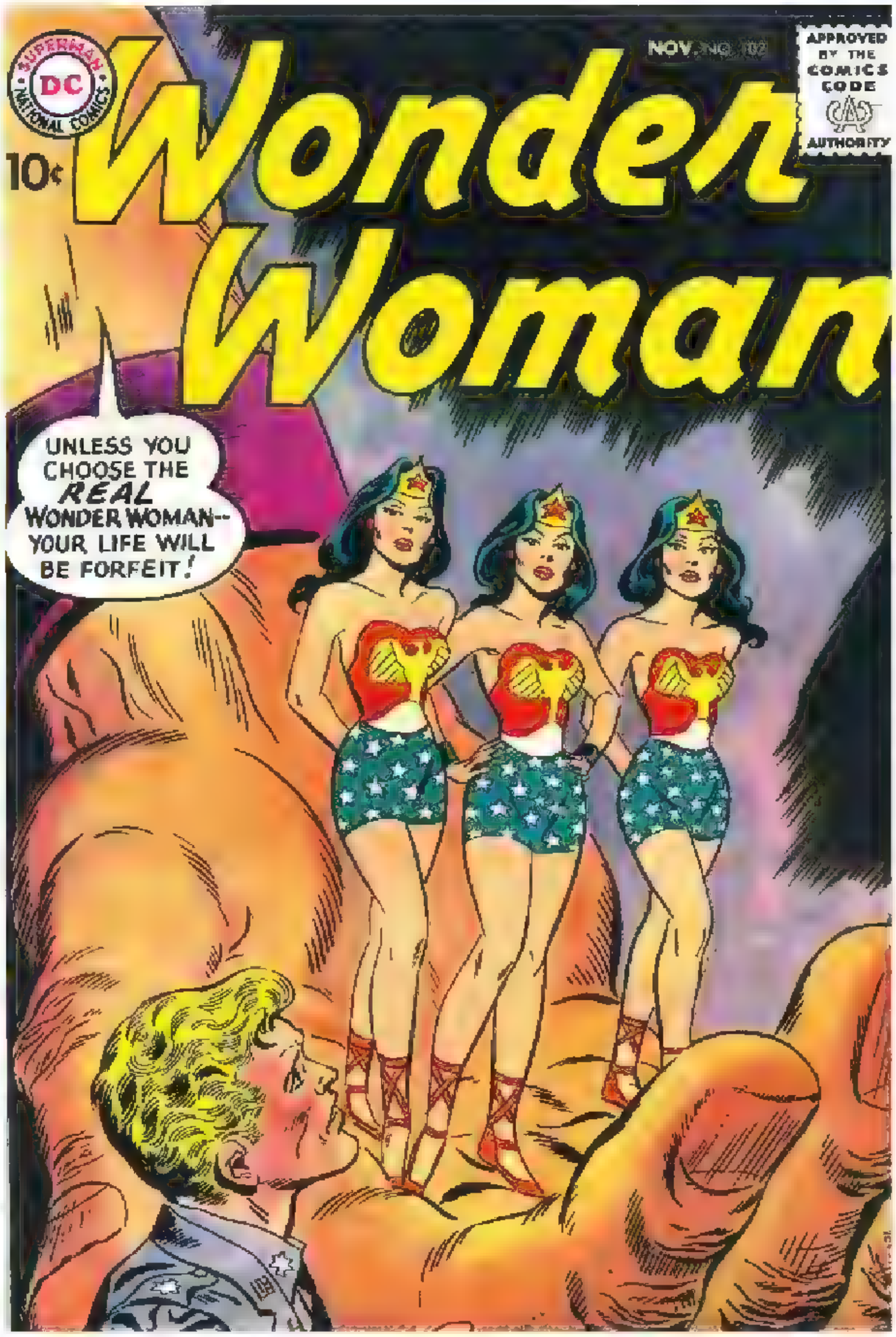
Within a year of her debut, Wonder Woman had become one of the most popular and visible characters in comics, but from the beginning this was a highly unusual strip. For a start, Marston's storytelling was unusual, with some of his tale told picture book style. Yet more strikingly, the themes were very different to most comics, with Wonder Woman's mission being not just to help smash the Nazi menace – though this was certainly part of it – but to break the chains of prejudice, man's superiority and prudery.

And chains were certainly part of it – ropes, too – with characteristic bondage imagery firmly in place from the off. Writing in the magazine *American Scholar*, Marston explained his approach. "A male hero," he wrote, "at best lacks the qualities of maternal love and tenderness which are as essential to the child as the breath of life." His Wonder Woman would be as "tender, submissive, and peace-loving as good women are," combining "all the strength of a Superman plus all the allure of a good and beautiful woman."

Wonder Woman had to walk a fine line, of course. The problem was that, then as now, boys – of all ages – read comics, and certainly superhero comics; girls not much. Marston was writing a proudly feminist book, but both he and All-American knew that the audience he could expect would be largely male.

Not that he was overly worried. "Give [men] an alluring woman stronger than themselves to submit to," he said, "and they'll be proud to become her willing slaves." And there was certainly a lot of submitting going on in *Wonder Woman*, »


NO. 1
10¢
SUMMER ISSUE
Wonder Woman
A COMPLETE 68 PAGE ISSUE CONTAINING ALL NEW NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED ADVENTURES OF WONDER WOMAN!


NOV. NO. 102
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
10¢
Wonder Woman
UNLESS YOU CHOOSE THE REAL WONDER WOMAN-- YOUR LIFE WILL BE FORFEIT!

with our girl soon proving herself as enthusiastic a "Bottom" as she was a "Top". In time, critics would have a field day.

Above: After a brief outing in *All Star Comics* and nine appearances as the lead in *Sensation Comics*, Wonder Woman gets her very own book
Right: Steve Trevor's set a *Blind Date* style challenge

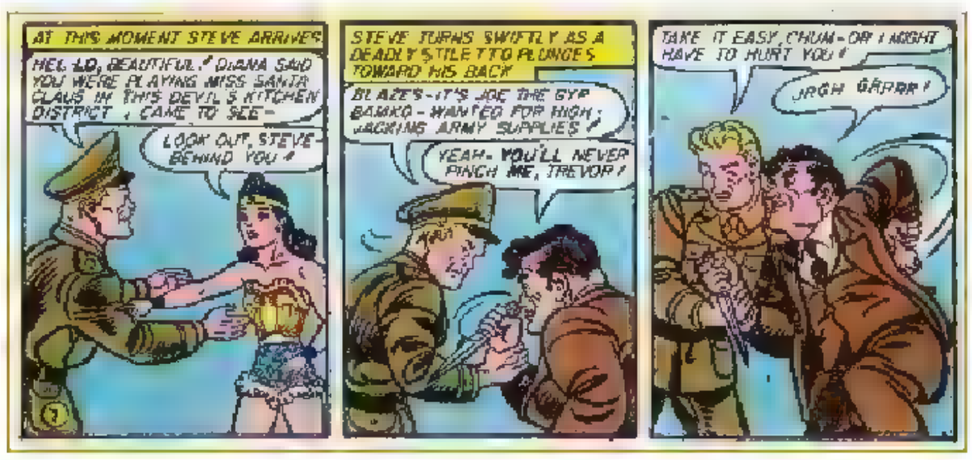
NEPTUNE'S TRIDENT!

Wonder Woman was always a little strange, then, but what made it special? For one thing, Marston had been right in his selection of creative partner. Both he and Peter were mature men, and brought with them an intellectual weight that most comic creators – just young boys, in the main – couldn't compete with. *Wonder Woman* had a complexity, a gravitas and a depth that made it stand out. It looked different too, the art clear and simple, but with an organic, rounded aesthetic that felt like you were looking at old woodcuts.

And *Wonder Woman* was inventive too, not least in its villains, who would make up one of the most bizarre rogue's galleries. Some, such as the multiple-personality society girl Cheetah and the misogynistic dwarf Dr Psycho are still major figures in the current DC Universe, but others were sadly culled and forgotten in the post-Marston years.

Amongst the most memorable: the Duke of Deception, a treacherous, shape-shifting minor god; Zara, Priestess of the Crimson Flame, who'd suffered abuse as a child slave; Hypnota, a woman disguised as a man, and gifted with the "Blue Rays of Dominance"; and the Mask, beaten wife of a top industrialist who now trapped her victims in BDSM-style gas masks. Then, in the very last story written by Marston, we would meet Villainy Inc, the first ever all-girl supervillain team – Cheetah, Doctor Poison, Hypnota, Giganta, Eviless and others, all now escaped from incarceration on the Amazons' Transformation Island (a specialist rehabilitation refuge, the sort of facility no male hero would think of).

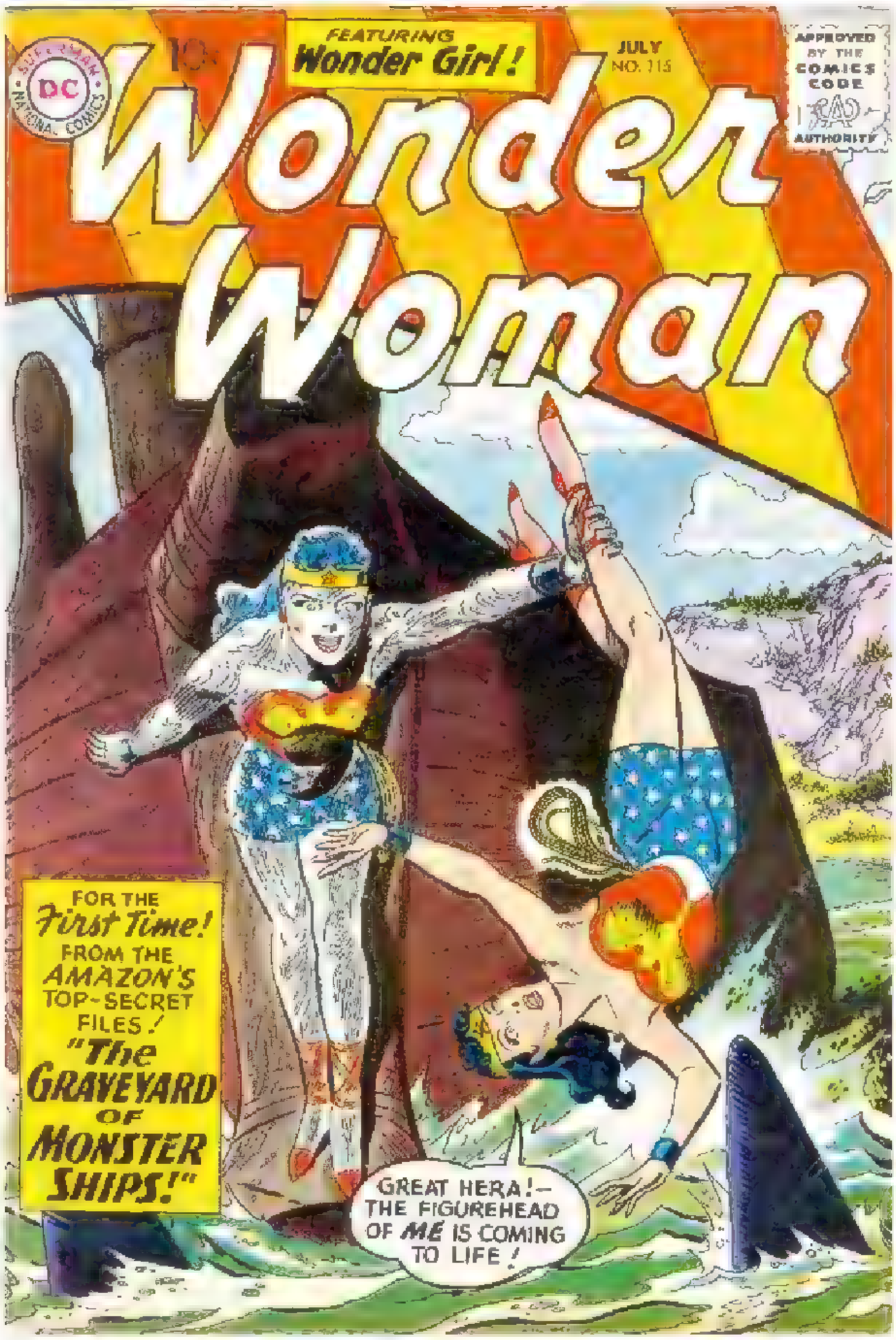
Themes quickly developed. Many villains were occultists, out to beguile the general population to their own selfish ends. More were abused women with a grudge to bear – an ugly ballerina passed up for plum roles became the Silver Swan, for instance – or appeared to be blokes, but were actually girls in disguise: Blue Snowman was one of these, as was Doctor Poison. And a great many – the Duke of Deception, Lord Conquest, the Earl of Greed – were agents of the war god Mars, who became Wonder Woman's "Big Bad" of the Golden Age, a symbol of ugly über-masculinity.

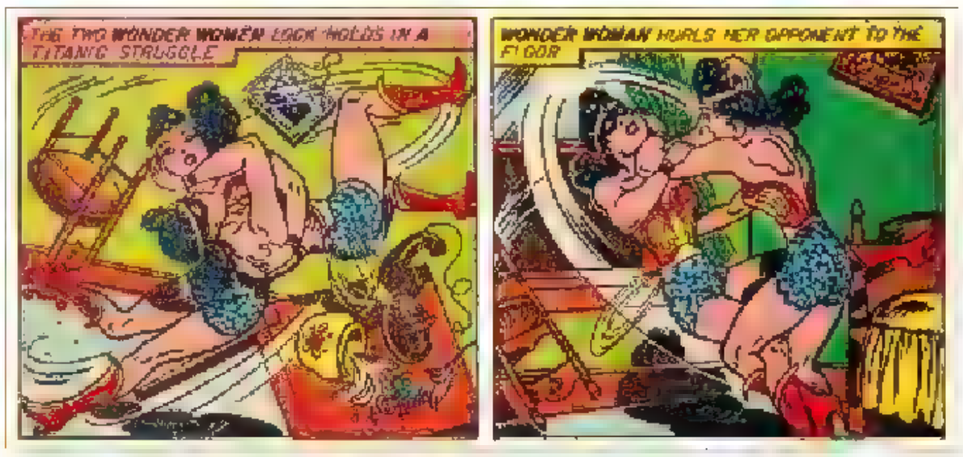

AT THIS MOMENT STEVE ARRIVES
HEL-LO, BEAUTIFUL! DIANA SAID YOU WERE PLAYING MISS SANTA CLAUS IN THIS DEVIL'S KITCHEN DISTRICT, CAME TO SEE—
LOOK OUT, STEVE BEHIND YOU!
STEVE TURNS SWIFTLY AS A DEADLY STILETTO PLUNGES TOWARD HIS BACK
BLAZES-IT'S JOE THE GYP BAMKO-WANTED FOR HIGH-JACKING ARMY SUPPLIES!
YEAH- YOU'LL NEVER PINCH ME, TREVOR!
TAKE IT EASY, CHUM-OR I MIGHT HAVE TO HURT YOU!
JRGH GRRR!

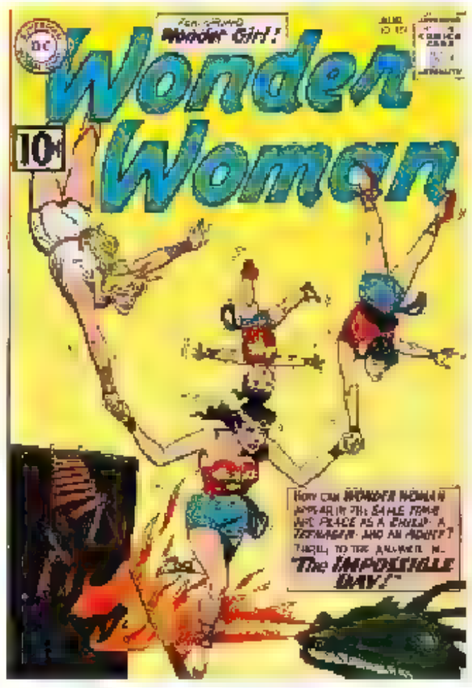
This said, of course, anything that could be considered a genuine hatred of men is a rare beast in classic *Wonder Woman*; bullies and abusers of both genders are the real targets, and Diana encourages true love between equals wherever she finds it. The problem is, of course, that she doesn't find it all that often – and, regularly, we see her explaining that romantic love is just another weapon men use to get women to do what they want, and that marriage is often a soul and brain destroying padded cell. Heady stuff for any kids' story, let alone one first published 70 years ago…

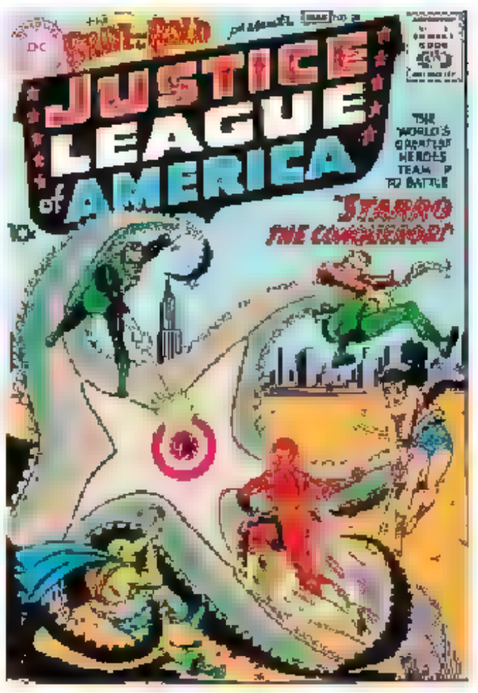
THUNDERBOLTS OF JOVE!

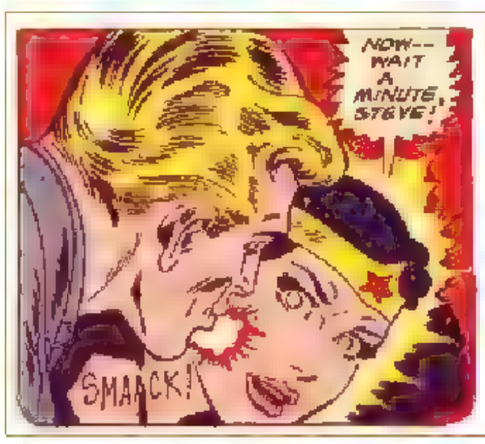
There was clearly a lot going on here, and though everyone could see that it worked, few – and certainly not DC editors such as Sheldon Mayer – could quite understand what *Wonder Woman* was on about. "Marston's idea of feminine supremacy was the ability to submit to male domination," Mayer would later say, and it seems like

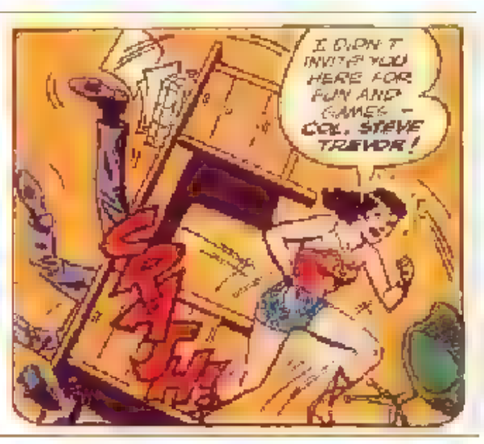

FEATURING Wonder Girl!
JULY NO. 115
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
Wonder Woman
FOR THE First Time! FROM THE AMAZON'S TOP-SECRET FILES! "The GRAVEYARD OF MONSTER SHIPS!"
GREAT HERA!— THE FIGUREHEAD OF ME IS COMING TO LIFE!











Left: Wonder Woman comes up against the particularly rubbish Angle Man, whose "angle" here is the power to animate objects

arguments about just how kinky *Wonder Woman* could get were constantly running behind the scenes. "That was one of the things that Marston fought to keep in."

Even a casual observer could see that Diana's adventures were increasingly dominated by images of women in ropes and chains – one 1942 short story had 15 separate bondage-themed panels, and a longer one published in 1948 boasted no fewer than 75. (Often, of course, these hapless victims included Steve Trevor – handsome and capable, but a role reversal hunk if ever there was one, always needing to be rescued by Diana.)

"There was a certain symbolism that Marston engaged in which was very simple and very broad," Mayer said. "I suspect [that stuff] probably sold more comic books than I realised." But could it be that the writer was doing something very deliberate here, ramming home this imagery to work on his audiences' subconscious in an almost clinical way, using sexual symbolism to create emotional response?

Sensations Comics #6 (June 1942) was a landmark issue for fans of adult rope tricks, as it introduced the kangas – strange horse-kangaroo things ridden in one of the most popular Amazon games, a "girl-roping contest". Wonder Woman is the best at yanking her sisters to the ground and tying them up, of course, and her reward is a lasso, made from tiny links of magic chain, which gives her complete domination over anyone she traps with it. "I can change character," says Diana. "I can make bad men good, and weak women strong."

"Diana's origin was largely rooted in "genuine" Greek myth and magic"

The lie detector guy had now found a way to get his heroine to compel her enemies to tell the truth, a humane way to incapacitate them – *and* equipped her with a great bondage aid. It's a further confusing, compelling bit of symbolism.

There was more to *Wonder Woman*, however, than oddball villains, slightly schizophrenic social commentary and bondage, for on top of all that was another layer yet – and it was one Marston had already exhibited an enthusiasm for. Unlike the pseudo-science of most superhero origins, Diana's was largely rooted in "genuine" Greek myth and magic; it didn't just suggest stories, but allowed her adventures to (reasonably convincingly) roam far and wide too. One month she'd fight aliens, the next some historical menace, then a modern day evil – and it all seemed authentically *Wonder Woman* somehow. (Not that Marston didn't play fast-and-loose with historic reality. One time our girl went back to help Boadicea throw the Romans out of Britain, which would raise eyebrows amongst all the real-life Legionnaires still there some 350 years later.)

HOLA!

Everything changed, of course, when Marston died in 1947 – though not immediately, as he was so far in advance on his scripts that new ones were still being published two years later. Still, »

without him *Wonder Woman*'s star would slowly fade, and it was soon clear that the self-empowerment text was falling by the wayside, along with most of the bizarre supervillains.

Mayer left too, retiring from editing to go back to cartooning, apparently when he heard a young artist refer to him as "the old man" – he was just 30 years old – while Peter's art began to deteriorate noticeably, becoming more cluttered and old fashioned. Increasingly, Diana would only use her superpowers off-panel or, at best, in extreme long shot.

Eventually *Wonder Woman* would fall into the hands of legendary DC editor Robert Kanigher – master of the gritty war story – and his lack of interest and commitment was plain to see. Kanigher

COMIC'S "GOLDEN AGE" RETURNS MORE DAZZLING THAN EVER!
SUPERMAN NATIONAL COMICS
DC
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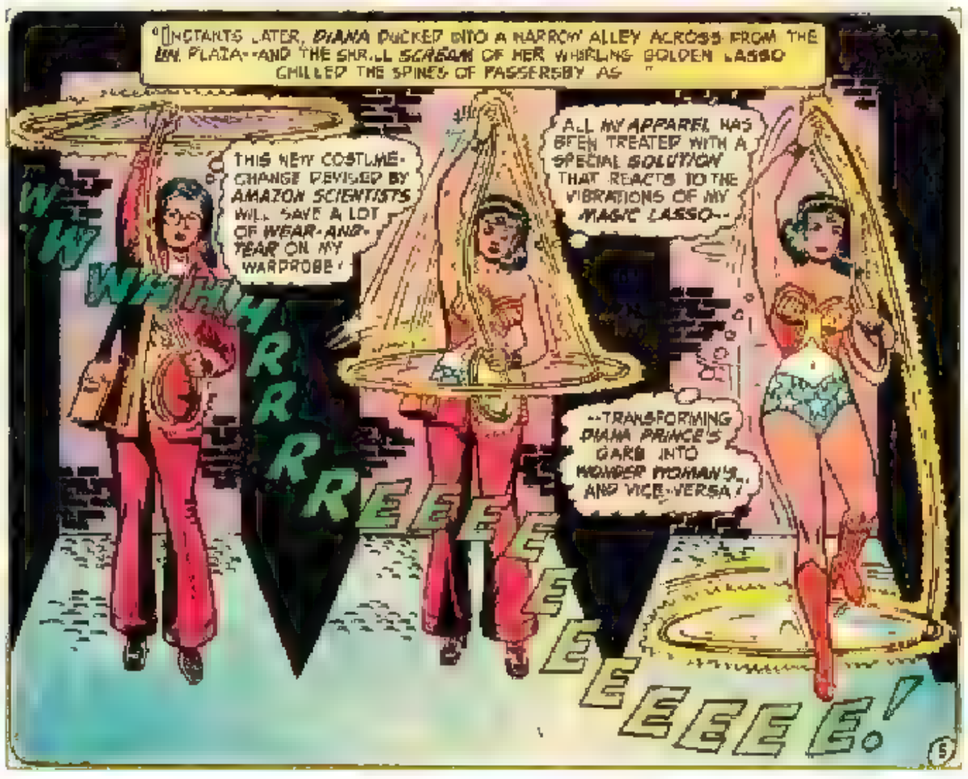
WONDER WOMAN
12¢
NOV. NO. 158
THRILL TO THE MOST STARTLING VILLAIN EVER DEVISED--The ORIENTAL EGGHEAD!... AND HIS "MUSTACHE TRAP!"--NEVER BEFORE SHOWN!
PITTING WONDER WOMAN AGAINST "THE FURY OF EGG FU!"
A TALE OF UNBEARABLE MENACE!

Above: The huge ovoid Egg Fu, with his whiplike moustache, ta ked a bit like Char e Chan

resented and despised the superhero genre at the best of times, and seemed to retain particular scorn for Diana Prince, this glamour-puss to whom the "problems and feats of men are mere child's play". As writer and editor from 1947 on, he introduced a dreary stream of aliens and ill-thought-through new bad guys, and systematically stripped out the political and psychological themes that had made the strip so intriguing.

There was no underlying theme to *Wonder Woman* any more – no questions about ancient myth co-existing with the modern world, or the ability of women to bring peace and sanity to the world of men – but instead merely a crazily bouncing shopping list of barely-connected events: a single issue might contain dinosaurs, time travel and alien robots, with only the thinnest web of coincidence holding them together.

And where the old baddies were weird, the new ones were almost deliberately stupid: Angle Man, a smirking underworld type who always had a sort-of-clever "angle" or plan; Mouse Man, who's six-inches tall and controls rodents; and the infamous Egg Fu, a Chinese Communist agent who's shaped like a giant egg and – oh dear – can't say the letter "r".


"[]NSTANTS LATER, DIANA DUCKED INTO A NARROW ALLEY ACROSS FROM THE UN. PLAZA--AND THE SHRILL SCREAM OF HER WHIRLING GOLDEN LASSO CHILLED THE SPINES OF PASSERSBY AS
THIS NEW COSTUME-CHANGE DEVISED BY AMAZON SCIENTISTS WILL SAVE A LOT OF WEAR-AND-TEAR ON MY WARDROBE!
ALL MY APPAREL HAS BEEN TREATED WITH A SPECIAL SOLUTION THAT REACTS TO THE VIBRATIONS OF MY MAGIC LASSO--
--TRANSFORMING DIANA PRINCE'S GARB INTO WONDER WOMAN'S... AND VICE-VERSA!
WWWHHRRRREEEEEEEEEE!

DESTINY CALLING

Perhaps because she was the only surviving female hero (almost every other superhero title had been cancelled at this point, with only a few *Batman* and *Superman* titles remaining), *Wonder Woman* continued to sell reasonably well throughout the '50s – or did she? There were rumours that DC only kept her in print because, if it didn't, rights would revert to the Marston estate – and they had too much tied up in licensing the character to allow that to happen.

Meanwhile, the anti-Kanigher brigade became increasingly vocal on the letters pages and elsewhere. When Roy Thomas and others formed the Academy of Comic Arts and Sciences and presented the first ever comic book awards in 1961, *Wonder Woman* grabbed "Worst Comic Book Currently Published".

And, amazingly, it would get worse before it got better...

DIANA FINDS HER GROOVE

STOP A WAR WITH LOVE

1962-1979

The feminist icon, the '70s TV sensation, and why all other female superheroes owe everything to Wonder Woman

Above: Wonder Woman as a strong, sexy secret agent type, n the style of *The Avengers* Emma Peel

It wouldn't be fair to say that there hadn't been attempts to modify and improve *Wonder Woman* during the slapdash Robert Kanigher era, but they were few and far between. At one point in the late '50s, for instance, artists Ross Andru and Mike Esposito had tried to give her a sexy new appearance, with more exotic features and wilder, more windblown hair – but her "slutty" look was soon nixed by a conservative DC, who wanted her demure curls back. The worry had been that this made Diana look too sexually available, and she was back to normal by #106.

Meanwhile, writer/editor Kanigher had redefined her powers as special gifts from the gods, making her a super-Amazon with strengths above and beyond those of her fellows. "Wonder Girl" and (yes, really) "Wonder Tot" flashback stories had even showed a young Diana with special powers, which make her feel more unique, yes – but stripped away whatever was left of the original Marston idea that "any woman can be like Wonder Woman".

But as her powers expanded, her aspirations narrowed, and Diana actually started to become the "good little housewife" she'd always struggled against – now she day-dreamed about marrying the Ken Doll-esque Steve Trevor constantly, while fretting that she would never be good enough for him.

Soon Wonder Girl and Wonder Tot were getting more play, first as "Impossible Tales" – like *Superman*'s "Imaginary Stories", but narrated by Queen Hippolyta, now calling herself "Wonder Queen" – then, without real explanation as to where they came from, as modern day Amazons, living on Paradise Island. With #159 they tried to take her back to her World War 2 roots, and not for the first time; it was another fail. By 1967, Diana was still battling "The Trap Of The Demon Man-Fish" and being told by a giant space-ape that she was "Pretty enough to be a gorilla – so I'm going to turn you into one of us!", while over at Marvel Peter Parker was throwing his Spidey duds into a trash can and Jim Steranko was wowing everyone on *Agent Of S.H.I.E.L.D.* Something had to change – and it did, during a particularly experimental period at DC...

FORGET THE OLD!

The so-called "relevance" explosion hit in the late '60s, as books like *Batman* and *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* got darker, grittier and more realistic – and Wonder Woman would now get her big break too. Revamp-king Denny O'Neil would attempt to save the character by changing her totally, his revamp kicking off with *Wonder Woman* #178 (Sep-Oct 1968).

"I'll lose him forever if I don't do something to keep him interested in me," Diana says – and, yes, she's banging on about Trev again – and so began a series of events that would completely reinvent the character. First Diana would quit her job at military intelligence, and her frumpy secret identity look; then all the other Amazons would disappear, apparently off to another dimension to stock up on magical energies. Robbed of her amazing powers and weapons, a newly kick-ass, high-fashion Diana would be forced to fight as a normal human girl.

"The New Wonder Woman" wore Op Art Emma Peel catsuits and, increasingly, a succession of all-white outfits, while sharing the masthead with, first, her new mentor – a slightly embarrassing blind martial arts master called I Ching, years before Daredevil ever ran across Stick – and then her own alter ego, Diana Prince.

Artist "Big" Mike Sekowsky, a veteran of Stan Lee's 1940s girls comics, is actually the hero here, for O'Neil was gone almost immediately, and it was Sekowsky – aided by the slick sophistication of Dick Giordano's inking – who'd mix supernatural, espionage and slice-of-life elements in such generally deft fashion, creating a warm, modern Diana, one who revelled in a sly wit rarely (if ever) seen before. His new Wonder Woman – a sort of softened version of Modesty Blaise – was designed to be a symbol of empowerment and self-determination, a woman of vast power and wealth who loses it all, but reinvents herself and takes charge of her life again.

The villains were quite fresh too, a mix of international crime cartels, urban sadists who prey on runaways, witches, assassins, even ghosts. Okay, so they were no Cheetah or Dr Psycho, but the strip was more lively than it had been for years. The art was stylish and kinetic too, lending energy and movement even to scenes where folks were sitting around chatting, often in the mod clothing boutique Diana was now running in her spare time, few dresses more bizarre than the shit she sold. It may not have been the "proper" *Wonder Woman* – and it never quite pulled off the goofy-cool *Avengers* TV show charm – but it was a good comic, and the best *Wonder Woman* had been since Marston's death.

Despite all its qualities, however, this wasn't a proper hit. Male readers – what there still were – pulled away in horror, and things never quite clicked with the girls either. Plus, Sekowsky suffered health

DC Wonder Woman
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The CHEETAH!
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DC Wonder Woman
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ARE YOU READY FOR THE INCREDIBLE ADVENTURE THAT CHANGED MY ENTIRE LIFE?!
YOU LIED TO ME YOU SAID YOU LOVED ME!
DIANA, DON'T LOOK AT ME THAT WAY
I BELIEVED YOU...
WAP
READ ALL ABOUT THE MOST DANGEROUS ENEMY I-CHING AND WONDER WOMAN EVER FACED!!
"The SINISTER Dr CYBER!"
AND THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING!!!

Above: By now Miss Prince was busy running a mod clothing boutique.
Left: Mike Sekowsky quit comics soon after this cover for #196

problems, and was soon turning in his stories late, the fill-in issues becoming legion. By 1971 *Wonder Woman* had been taken from him, and Sekowsky gave up on the industry for good, leaving for California to work in animation – but his parting shot, the cover for #196, proved the new Diana Prince had in no way given up on her favourite fetishes. Topless, chained spread-eagle and with a target painted on her back, she glances over her shoulder with a look that could be read all sorts of ways…

WONDER WOMAN FOR PRESIDENT

Now, with #197, Dennis O'Neil was back to finish what he had barely started. Famed feminist Gloria Steinem had been very vocal that this heroine of her childhood, the strongest of pop culture females, had been robbed of her powers and costume – she's become a mere female James Bond, she said, made even more boring because "she was denied his sexual freedom" – and O'Neil saw winning her over as something of a challenge.

He had just the secret weapon to do it with too, bringing famed gay SF novelist Samuel R Delaney on board as writer – a bold plan that collapsed almost immediately, delivering a single two-part Feminist story. (Seriously: above the logo it read: "Special! Women's Lib Issue!") Here Diana's homeless and working in a department store, when she realises the all-female staff are earning below minimum wage; Wonder Woman fights back, but there's a twist in the tale when the shop's forced to close – and now Diana has 250 jobless women baying for her blood. It's total rubbish, of course, and its notorious-even-by-*Wonder-Woman*-standards bondage cover got people giggling – but the thought was there. Briefly *Wonder Woman* was playing the *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* "relevance" game, and getting a certain amount of kudos for it.

It was around now, too, that a still-unimpressed Steinem and the *Ms Magazine* staff would put the Golden Age Wonder Woman on their cover ("Wonder Woman for President" read the legend), and bring out a hardback anthology collection of the heroine's Golden Age adventures, complete with top-notch essays on the character.

"Queen Hippolyta founds nations, wages war to protect Paradise Island, and sends her daughter off to fight the forces of evil in the world," Steinem would write. "Wonder Woman symbolises many of the values of the women's culture that feminists are now trying to introduce into the mainstream… a diminishing both of 'masculine' aggression and of the belief that violence is the only way of solving conflicts."

Two conflicting versions of what *Wonder Woman* might be were very much in the public spotlight, but though all this kerfuffle got the strip noticed, sales didn't increase that much, and soon this entire "reinvention" period was being seen as something of a failure across the board; after all, even *Batman*'s hard-hitting storylines and glorious art couldn't disguise the simple truth that overall sales were down. By the time 1973 swung around, the superheroes were taking back their silly powers and bright costumes, and *Wonder Woman* was no different – soon the star-spangled knickers returned, I Ching

“Sekowsky created a warm, modern Diana, one who revelled in a sly wit”

Above & Right: Whether she's bound and gagged, or chained to a wall, bondage has been a constant theme

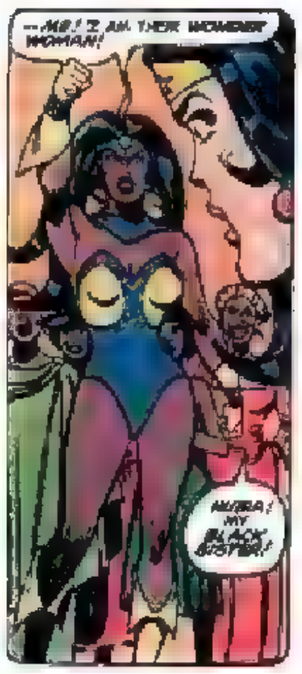
would be dead, and (horror of horrors) Robert Kanigher was back writing the book again. On #205 Wonder Woman is strapped to a bright purple nuclear missile crashing towards New York, and it was back to business as usual, it seemed.

IN YOUR SATIN TIGHTS

Except elsewhere, things were starting to get interesting again. As the '70s rolled on, DC was getting more and more interested in licensing out its characters and there were numerous stabs at making *Wonder Woman* work as a TV movie.

Hopes were high, but Diana's small-screen incarnation was in no way an overnight hit. ABC's first attempt, in 1974, had featured the undeniably beautiful Cathy Lee Crosby, a slim blonde with an angular, slightly cold face and relatively short hair – problematically, she looked bugger all like the comic book version, and the story she starred in had precious little to do with DC's golden girl either.

But ABC and Warner Bros persevered, and now Stanley Ralph Ross, who'd written Catwoman-centric episodes of *Batman*, came up with a stronger take on the subject. Now we'd have a World War 2 setting, loyal to the first comic books; we'd enjoy a version of Marston's origin story; and, best of all, we'd have a brilliant star in struggling actress Lynda Carter, who captured the character perfectly. ABC named the second TV movie *The New, Original Wonder Woman*, and though many fretted over Carter's inexperience, the important people backed her – including executive producer Douglas S Cramer. "To tell you the truth," Carter later said, " I couldn't pay my next month's rent when I got the part."



Two one-hour TV specials followed before, in late 1976, ABC finally launched a full series of weekly hour-long adventures. Amazingly, many of Marston's themes were present and correct. The comic books were referenced in the cartoony opening credits, while captions cropped up throughout the show itself. Meanwhile, a brilliantly hummable theme song summed up the "rehabilitation" vibe of the Marston comics in thrilling fashion: "Make a hawk a dove, stop a war with love, make a liar tell the truth," it trills, then, "stop a bullet cold, make the Axis fold, change their minds – and change the world."

Production values were cheesy but serviceable – the celebrated spin, glasses in hand, wherein Diana Prince changes into costume was a genius TV-only innovation – and Carter threw herself into the fights enthusiastically, eventually becoming an honorary member of the Stunt Women's Association for her efforts.

The result was an unusual adventure series, but an undeniably distinctive one, with its female lead, period setting and strange camp-but-serious sensibility. When the second season was picked up by CBS the action was updated to the present day.

Fans still argue about the qualities of the two seasons – and while making it "modern" definitely turned *Wonder Woman* into more of a generic '70s action show, for Carter the CBS episodes were an improvement. "I think I was much better in the part," she'd later say. "I tried to play her just like a regular woman who happened to have superpowers. I figured she'd lived with it every day of her life."

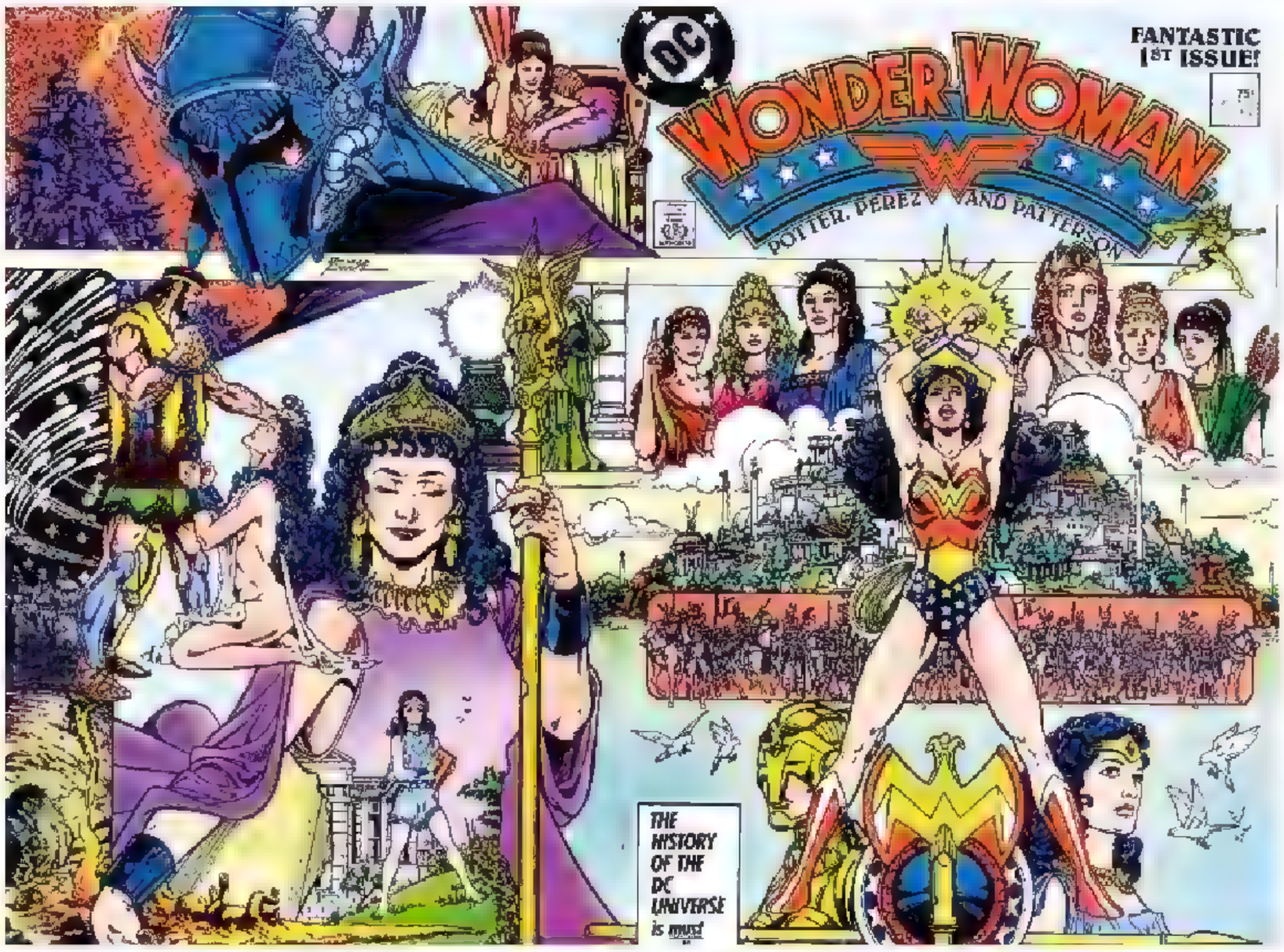
Wonder Woman was big news, at last, but while the TV series shone in its thrillingly tacky fashion, the comics remained increasingly dire. The Feminists had embraced her, and Wonder Woman imagery was everywhere, but it would take another decade, and another man, to drag the comics up where they belonged...

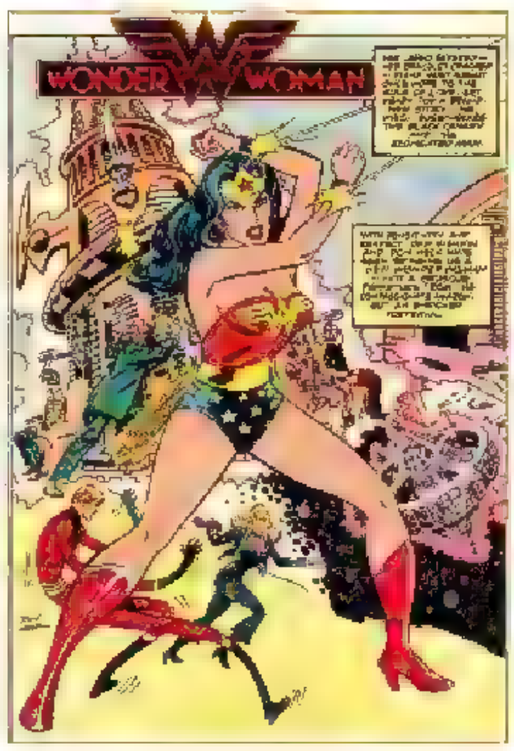
REJUVENATION!

WARRIOR PRINCESS

1980-2014

The modern WW, from Morrison to Azzarello: DC's third most important hero, fierce, confident and tough as nails





Above: Don Heck's surpr singly good run culm nated with Diana gett ng hitched to Steve Trevor, r ght

As things stood at the beginning of the '80s, reading *Wonder Woman* was a pretty drab experience – as it was with so many DC heroes. The TV show was over, no creative team hung around for long on the comic book, and, once again, no one seemed to know what to do with her. Worse, we enjoyed a succession of false dawns. First, with issue #288 (February 1982), we finally got what looked like a good – and, hopefully, stable – creative team. Roy Thomas and Gene Colan need little introduction, and took Diana seriously, though some complained that the swirling, spooky Colan art was unsuited to a character as essentially sunny as this. They began with a bang: "Look out, world! Wonder Woman is busting' loose!" screamed the cover, together with the bizarre detail of one of the hopeless gun-thugs shooting pointlessly at our girl shouting conspiratorially to the reader, with a fourth wall-breaking grin, "An' this time, nothing will stop her!" But it ended with a whimper. After barely six issues both creators lost interest and moved on.

Issue #300 went past, with interesting guest artists galore, then a very uninspiring-sounding team took over – writers Dan Mishkin and Mindy Newell and veteran industry workhorse Don Heck – and, to everyone's surprise, started to do rather well with the book.

Heck had always drawn beautiful girls, and here really started to kick against his hack reputation, delivering some of his prettiest art in years. Not that there was much chance for it to go anywhere, for DC was just marking time until the biggest shake up in the company's history: *Crisis On Infinite Earths*. Heck's last issue before the old Wonder Woman was replaced with a brand new version saw her finally marry Steve Trevor – "Hey, Zeus," he asks, "how are you at performing marriages?" – and settle down; it's no Alan Moore's last *Superman* story, but it still brings a tear to the eye.

UNCONSCIOUSLY, I'VE BEEN EXPECTING THIS, EVER SINCE STEVE TOLD ME ACHILLEOCK WOULD BE MEETING WITH CHURCHILL TONIGHT!
BLITZKRIEG WILL FINISH THEM BOTH.
--UNLESS I STOP HIM!
AND THE WAY TO DO THAT--
--IS AS WONDER WOMAN!

THE CHALLENGE OF THE GODS

Post-*Crisis*, of course, everything changed. Wonder Woman had "died" in that out-with-the-old miniseries, devolved back to the clay she was originally made from, and the way was now clear for a new, fresher incarnation of Diana, as curated by superstar artist George Pérez. As with all the other DC heroes, it was now deemed that the earlier *Wonder Woman* adventures had "never happened", and she would be reintroduced as a brand new character, starting with a new issue #1.

Pérez had initially been teamed with *Jemm, Son Of Saturn*-creator Greg Potter, who'd done much of the early development work on the new series, but after just three issues the writer disappeared from the book – and, seemingly, from comics – leaving Pérez to plot and draw the thing solo, bar a little script help from veteran Len Wein. That a figure as prominent as Pérez should choose this gig of all the post-*Crisis* revamps surprised many at DC, not least the artist himself. Offering to take her on "just came out of my mouth," he later said.

His new Wonder Woman, like the old one, had been fashioned of clay by Queen Hippolyta of the Amazons, then given life by ancient Greek magic. Steve Trevor still crashes near her home, but now Paradise Island has a proper name – Themyscira – and the pilot was less wishy-washy, and not necessarily a romantic interest at all.

In many ways the new Wonder Woman was closer to the original Marston version than she'd been for years, in that this Diana only outstrips the other Amazons by virtue of bravery, determination and skill, not through inherent additional magic powers. The emphasis, too, is back on Wonder Woman fighting to improve Man's World by good example.

Other subtle changes were made too. Boston – so little seen in comics – becomes

Above: Deodato's highly sexualised mid-90s take on Wonder Woman, all glossy lips and heaving breasts
Left: Bill Messner-Loebs took over with #63, he would later create Artemis

her new home, and Wonder Woman develops a new supporting cast. Pérez got rid of the old idea of Diana using a secret identity too. Finally, in the interests of keeping the mythology straight, the old Roman names were binned in favour of pure Greek – Mars is now referred to as Ares, for instance. This meant an end to the weird super-tech of the old Paradise Island too. "I wanted to purify the concept," the artist said.

LOOK BACK IN WONDER

So how well does this reinvention work? Brilliantly, most would say.

In general, Pérez – working with female editors like Janice Race and Karen Berger – pulls a blinder. His *Wonder Woman* is well-paced and lovingly crafted, with well-rounded characters, intriguing plots and the great benefit of his fetishistically detailed art. There's a grandeur and an epic feel to it, with many of the gods – not least the pushy Hermes – becoming major supporting characters.

With #25, though, things slightly stutter. Though *Wonder Woman* was selling better than it had for years, it still wasn't doing well enough to make an artist like Pérez the royalties he might expect, and he felt he had to give up drawing it, moving on to better-paying gigs. The slightly muddy work of Chris Marrinan struggled to cut it as a replacement, and though Pérez continued to write *Wonder Woman* for a while, the stories swiftly went off the boil.

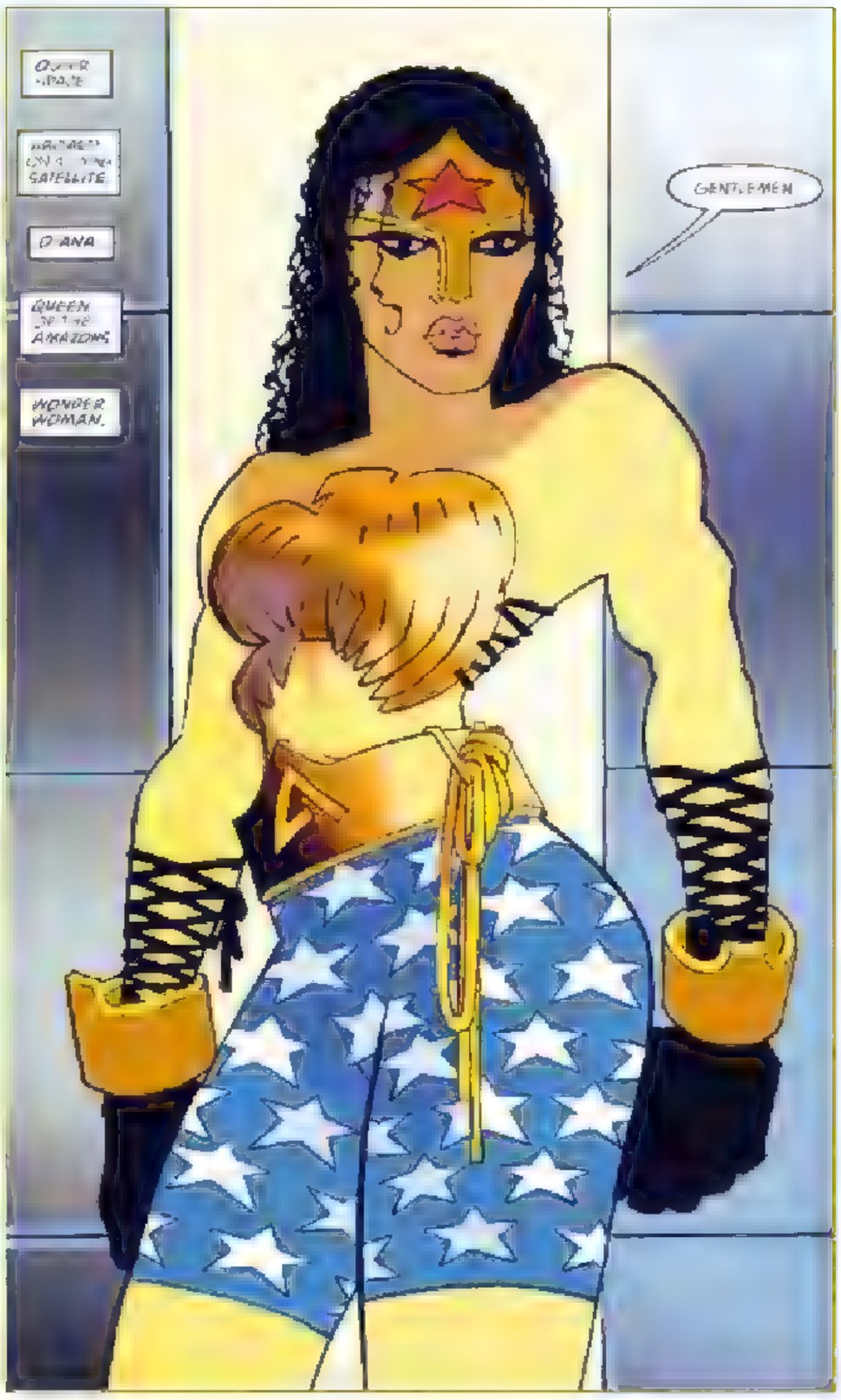
"Pérez pulls a blinder: his *Wonder Woman* is well-paced and lovingly crafted"

And it got worst post-Pérez, with Diana soon enduring a pointless run of adventures in space. For a while it was only a terrific set of Brian Bolland covers – from #63-#100, virtually every one iconic – that kept *Wonder Woman* on the radar at all.

The years since have been a mixed bag. The Bill Messner-Loebs issues of the mid-'90s, with their in-your-face Good Girl art by Mike Deodato, sold like gangbusters, but split fandom – some appreciated the introduction of important new characters like Artemis, but others couldn't see past the ridiculous boobs and teeny outfits.

Then came John Byrne – who should have been a saviour for the book, ushering in a new Golden Age at least as strong as Pérez managed – but who somehow failed to bring the magic. He had fun replacing Diana with Hippolyta for a time, and sending her back for WW2 adventures, but in large part he stripped the character of everything distinctive and cool.

Indeed, it was often in DC's events and team books that we'd enjoy the strongest reminders of the Wonder Woman we all wanted to see. In Grant Morrison's blockbuster summer movie version of the *JLA*, every character got poetically cool moments, but Diana more than most. At one point she takes out a vast heaven-sent battleship: from below we see explosions marching along its length, as – Ka-Choom, Ka-Choom, Ka-Choom – Diana smashes all opposition from the inside, and an awe-struck Aquaman whispers "Angels… meet Diana." This was Wonder Woman as icon, and other superheroes were awed by her presence. »



Above: A particularly bizarre bodied Diana – what's going on with her arm?! – in Miller's *Dark Knight Strikes Again*

Later, in the much-disliked *Batman: The Dark Knight Strikes Again*, Frank Miller adds a throwaway *300*-style Spartan nose guard to the tiara, and it makes perfect sense; suddenly, it's a warrior's helm.

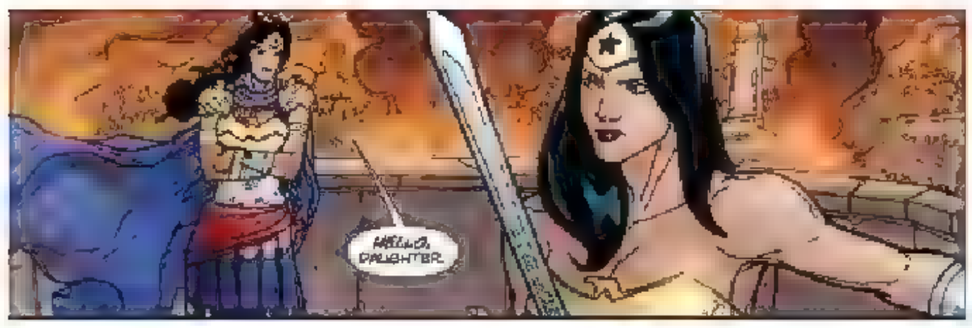
In the regular comics, meanwhile, Phil Jiminez – whose art style resembles Pérez's – did his best to recreate the initial post-*Crisis* glory years, then Greg Rucka modernised the Greek gods, giving them business suits and laptops. Gail Simone became the character's longest running female writer, and J Michael Straczynski guided an alternative timeline story not un-reminiscent of his *Thor* run, where the Amazons have been living amongst mankind all along, not realising who they are.

Parallel to all this, meanwhile, ran a sometimes intriguing, often annoying, sub-strand, wherein the Amazons are made to look like violent semi-bad guys. When Wonder Woman snaps the neck of hero-turned-villain Maxwell Lord in the painfully violent *Infinite Crisis*, she probably saves countless lives from the prospect of a homicidally mind-controlled Superman, but the other heroes turn against her, regardless. And in the horrendous six-part 2007 "event" *Amazons Attack!*, Themyscira launches all-out war against Washington DC, apparently killing innocent, unarmed children.

There should be violence in Wonder Woman's world, of course – it would be in no way loyal to the Greek myths on which it's based if there were not – but surely, not like this?

GODS DRAW BLOOD

Since 2011, of course, *Wonder Woman* has been enjoying something of a Golden Age – if something so borderline horrific could be called such. Writer Brian Azzarello and artist Cliff Chiang – illustrating in a bold colour palate of reds and blues, hot and cold all at once – have been in charge of Diana's New 52 incarnation for knocking-on three years now, and it's been terrific: an intelligent revamp, heaving with new supporting characters, revelling in yet another revised origin, and, by removing the Amazons for the time being, freeing up plenty of space for very modern takes on the Olympian gods.

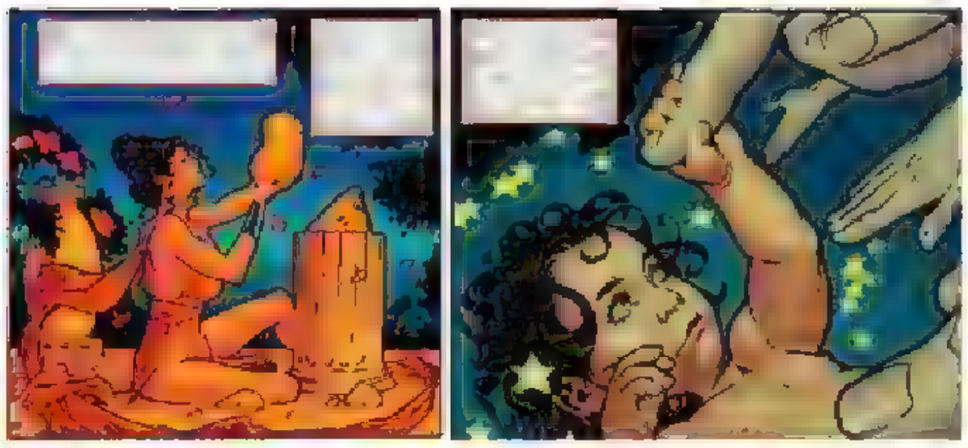


The current team has been running chunky year-long story arcs that are proving to be one of the true sales and critical smashes of the modern DC – *IGN*, for instance, voted it Best Comic Series of 2013 – and it's all been building toward this summer's "Battle For Olympus", at which point the run will end, leaving someone with almost impossibly big boots to fill.

The changes are legion. Characters are killed off with a *Game Of Thrones*-style glee, and both Wonder Woman and the Amazons in general have been allowed to be much more in-your-face sexual than they've been in the past, kinky-bitch bondage games aside. Forget mooning over the plastic Steve Trevor: now Diana's in a relationship with Superman – well, of course she is – while the sexual tension with the brash, violent Orion of the New Gods (a stroke-of-genius foil for Diana) is off the hook. And then there's the controversial "Sex Pirate" angle, in which the Amazons are revealed as vicious killers – sirens who periodically go to sea, seduce random sailors, then toss their exhausted bodies into the Briny. It's shocking, but it feels real – and effectively explains why Diana is different to the other Amazons. After all, her father was the King of the Gods, while theirs were scruffy seadogs, effectively raped for their seed.

Which brings us to the smartest change of all – making Diana the biological daughter of Zeus and Queen Hippolyta. Now released from her weird and creepy origins, this Diana now has all the deities of Olympus as her relatives, with the complications and opportunities that brings. Heaving with prophecy and family drama, and with the menace of the First Born – Zeus and Hera's first child, buried deep beneath the earth many centuries ago – ever present, this is a dark reinvention that rings exciting and true.

Throughout it all, however, it remains true to the character – so this Wonder Woman is still winning over some of her greatest enemies (lately Hera, Zeus's wife and one-time Queen of the Gods) and making them her staunchest allies. After all, chief amongst Wonder Woman's formidable array of superpowers has always been the ability to turn people around.



Above: Azzarello and Chiang's New 52 incarnation of the Amazonian Princess is the best she's been in years

Following the Azzarello run will be quite the challenge for some lucky creative team, but in the meantime there are still Wonder Woman stories to look forward to, not least the 120-page *Wonder Woman: The Trial Of Diana Prince*, a glossy mother-daughter story – packed with the inevitable love-hate dynamic of such – by Grant Morrison and artist Yanick Paquette, designed as the latest of DC's prestigious *Earth One* out-of-continuity graphic novels.

"It's not like a superhero comic," Morrison has said. "It's about the sexes and how we feel about one another, and how she represents the best of something."

Considering all the disappointments the character has suffered in recent years – the collapse of the much-anticipated Joss Whedon movie project of the mid-noughties, the disappointment of both the actually-made 2011 NBC TV pilot and the never-shot Warner Bros TV project *Amazon* – and uncertainly over what sort of prominence Diana will receive in the upcoming *Man Of Steel* sequel, it's good to know that the comics, at least, are in the rudest of health.

ALL THE WORLD IS WAITING FOR YOU

Wonder Woman remains a confused, and sometimes confusing, figure. The fact is – and it's largely to do with her being a woman, the first and most potent female superhero by far – she's nuanced in ways that most of her male counterparts are not. She's a helper, proud and supremely self-aware; she's the Spirit Of Truth, with an unbreakable sense of honour. And she boasts a level of compassion that's almost self-sacrificing.

Perhaps the problem is that she's such a strong person, so grounded, that some creators get frustrated – how do you stop her looking so damn perfect? What can you throw at her that will convincingly upset her? It makes writing her well one of the great challenges in comics.

And on top of all the comic book triumphs, old and new, Wonder Woman has an extra weight to her too. Is she the first pop culture Feminist? Quite possibly. She certainly works at a level of camp and of total seriousness, as woman and as icon. When the fashion designer Diana von Furstenberg did a Wonder Woman-themed collection a few years ago – "She's so powerful," she's said, "I love her" – no one batted an eyelid. Women are the way of the future and sisterhood is stronger than anything, *Wonder Woman* says. And what comic book message is more challenging, or more exciting, than that?

"Writing Wonder Woman well is one of the great challenges in comics"

The current, magnificent Brian Azzarello/ Cliff Chiang run on ***Wonder Woman*** *concludes some time this summer; Grant Morrison's graphic novel, meanwhile, has yet to be scheduled.*

JUDGE JAMES'S COMICS COURTROOM

Daft vigilante action from Atlas Comics with *John Targitt... Man-Stalker*. Hardboiled, violent and cartoony? **Judge James Lovegrove** presides...

PROSECUTION: We have here before us today, m'lud, a strange tale of revenge and chicanery. I refer not merely to the comic presently on trial, *Targitt*, but to the story behind the genesis of its publishing company. Atlas Comics is not to be confused with the 1950s imprint that evolved into Marvel. Rather, it's the company set up by former Marvel bigwig Martin Goodman in 1974, which he intended not only to rival the hugely successful House of Ideas, but to surpass it in sales and renown. Having sold Marvel to Cadence Industries two years earlier, Goodman left his son Chip in charge as editorial director. Stan Lee, however, soon ousted Chip Goodman from that job, earning him the undying enmity of Goodman senior.

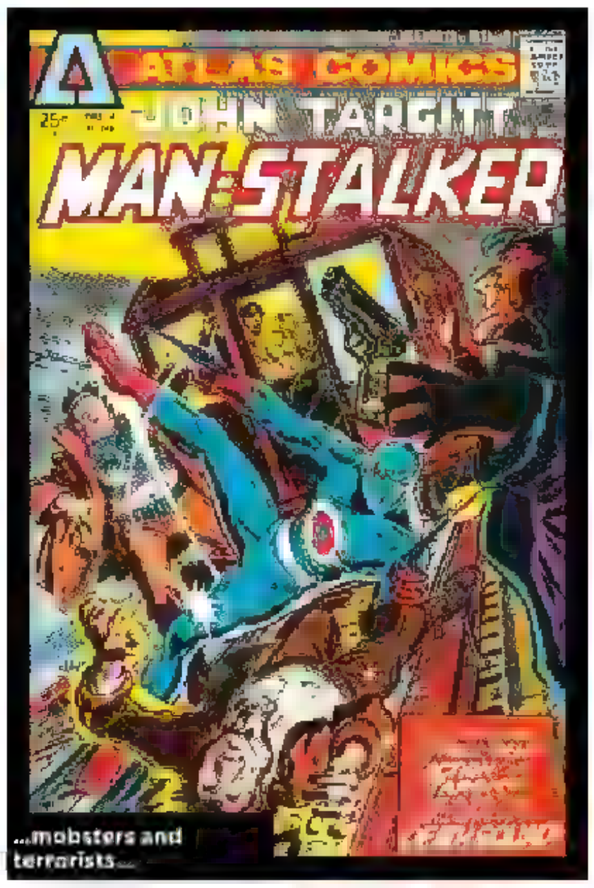
DEFENCE: In setting up Atlas, Goodman was not motivated solely by pique and greed. He offered comics freelancers higher rates of pay than they were receiving at either Marvel or DC, along with a share of character ownership and a guarantee to artists that their artwork would be returned to them. This was unheard of in those ruthless work-for-hire days. He felt that creators with a personal stake in the comics they produced would turn in quality work. These incentives lured some of the top talent of the day to Atlas, among them Neal Adams, Steve Ditko, John Severin, Wally Wood and Mike Sekowsky. It was a noble venture, and soon the Big Two felt compelled to follow suit, also agreeing to return artwork.

PROSECUTION: Jeff Rovin, formerly of Warren Comics, was appointed editor at Atlas, with a brief to establish a line of superhero comics with the edginess and unconventional pizzazz of Marvel. Rovin, however, seemed to have other ideas. "My own ambition from the start was to do characters that were a bit outré and experimental," he has said, "somewhat more hard-bitten and schizophrenic than the average superhero." His tactic was to take popular literary, TV and movie properties and carry out what one might euphemistically call "retasking". In other words, swipe mercilessly. Thus Atlas put out not one but two of its own versions of *Conan The Barbarian* – *Wulf The Barbarian* and *Iron-Jaw* – and borrowed the premise of the movie *The Omega Man* for its *Planet Of Vampires*. *Morlock 2001* is a bizarre fusion of *Swamp Thing* and *1984*, while in characters such as the Brute, the Grim Ghost and the Tarantula we see darker, monstrous equivalents of the Hulk, Ghost Rider and Spider-Man.

DEFENCE: Which brings us to *Targitt*. No one can deny the influence of early-'70s cop and vigilante films on the title. John Targitt is an FBI agent whose wife and daughter are killed in a plane bombing and who consequently embarks on a one-man vendetta against criminals. As such he is reminiscent of Paul Kersey, the character played by Charles Bronson in the *Death Wish* series. Targitt carries a .44 Magnum handgun, like Dirty Harry in the Clint Eastwood movies. His surname echoes that of Frank Bullitt, protagonist of *Bullitt*, played by Steve McQueen. At the time, though, it was a radical move to publish a mainstream, Code-approved newsstand comic focusing on an embittered, gun-toting rogue law enforcer who is unafraid to shoot baddies in the face

PROSECUTION: Ah, the infamous face-shooting in issue #1. As rendered by artist Howard Nostrand, the moment is farcical. In one panel, Targitt wedges his gun under the nose of mob hitman Alan Greenburg. In the next, the gun goes off with a BAM! and Greenburg's head disappears in a puff of smoke, almost as though in a conjuring trick. Two pages later a grenade detonates with the sound effect BLOOEY! This and Nostrand's penchant for exaggeratedly comedic facial expressions are at odds with the tough-guy dialogue provided by scripter Ric Meyers. If Rovin was after comics that were "schizophrenic", he certainly got that with *Targitt*.

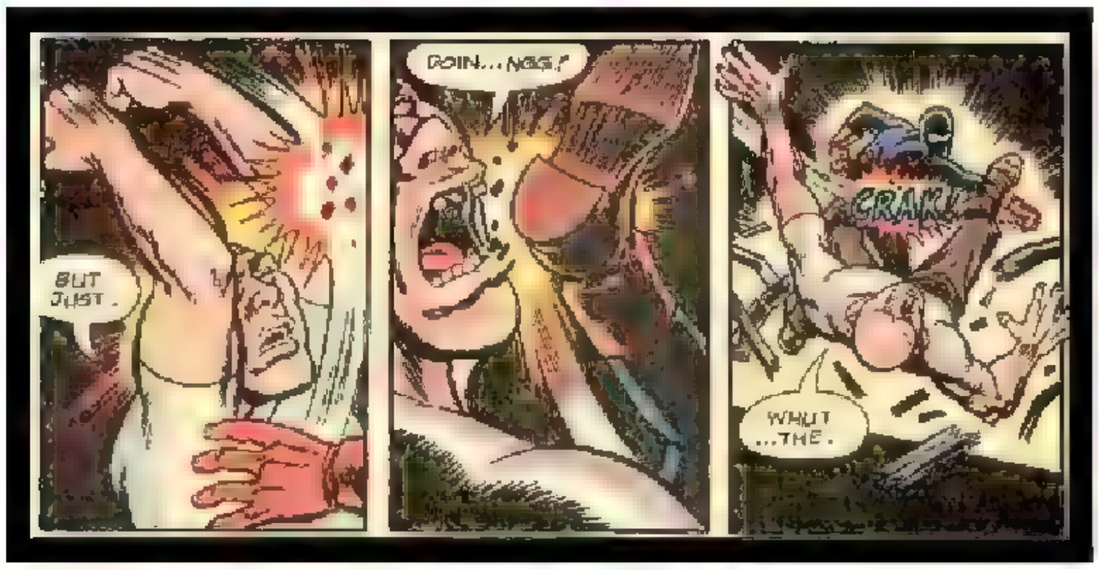
Targitt took on drug dealers...



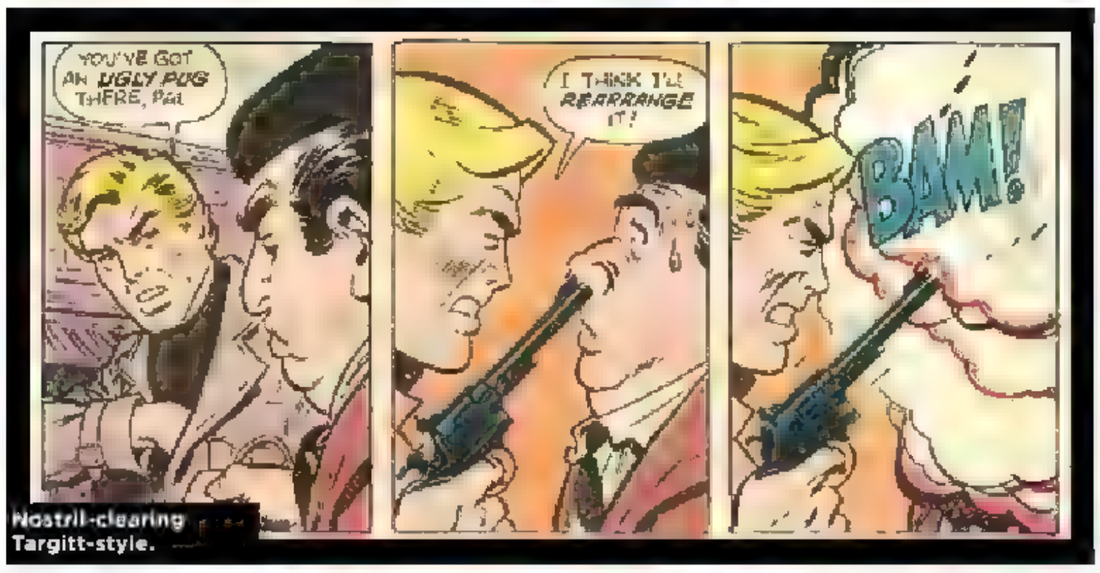
...mobsters and terrorists...

John bowls in with both barrels blazing.

They all manage to miss the bullseye.



...and supervillain Professor Death.



Nostril-clearing Targitt-style.

> **Targitt's costume features a huge target emblem... it's as if he's inviting his enemies to take aim**

DEFENCE: Issue #2 marks a bold new start as Targitt, now an FBI operative again, goes after Arab terrorists intent on disrupting America's oil supply. Mid-mission he dons a skintight black suit with goggles and a full face mask; this has been supplied to him by his boss, Carl, in order that he can continue his work undercover, not drawing attention to himself. The comic is retitled *John Targitt, Man-Stalker*, to reflect its more superheroic flavour.

PROSECUTION: "Not drawing attention to himself." Forgive, Your Honour, a little laughter in court. Targitt's costume features a huge target emblem on the chest. It's as if he's inviting his enemies to take aim and score a bullseye. At any rate, his adventures are still crudely violent and cartoonishly rendered. "Name's Targitt," says Targitt as he punches out a thug then tosses him into a vat of boiling oil. "I live by the saying 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you'. And in case you didn't get the point," he adds, shooting the man several times as he burns, "here's a neat little postscript." Incredible as it may seem, things only get worse with the third and final issue.

DEFENCE: Worse? I beg to differ. In #3, Targitt goes up against a proper supervillain, Professor Death, who throws skull-shaped bombs containing a nerve gas called Death-13. Somehow exposure to the gas imbues Targitt with enhanced strength and endurance. His costume is also now bulletproof and fitted with power-armour-style "servo-mechanisms". In short, Targitt is on his way to becoming a bona fide superhero. Had the comic continued, who knows what interesting further developments there might have been.

PROSECUTION: ***Targitt*'s constant, disorientating shifts in tone and direction are symptomatic of the problems Atlas was experiencing at boardroom level. Goodman was unhappy with Rovin's efforts and kept demanding that the Atlas line be "Marvelised". This resulted in midstream changes exactly like those that afflicted *Targitt*, across the entire line. Readers could be forgiven for not knowing what was going on and abandoning the comics. A little over a year after its inception, Atlas closed down, having published just some 60-odd comics in total and never once troubled Marvel on the sales front; this particular David was roundly, effortlessly trounced by Goliath.**

DEFENCE: Many comics aficionados remember Atlas fondly, and there is no denying the quality of some of its output, such as Howard Chaykin's *The Scorpion*, a character he later revisited as Dominic Fortune, and *Wulf The Barbarian*, with excellent art from Larry Hama and Klaus Janson. Issue #3 of *Morlock 2001* has Ditko pencils inked by Berni Wrightson, a combination that works surprisingly well. The imprint tried, you have to give it that.

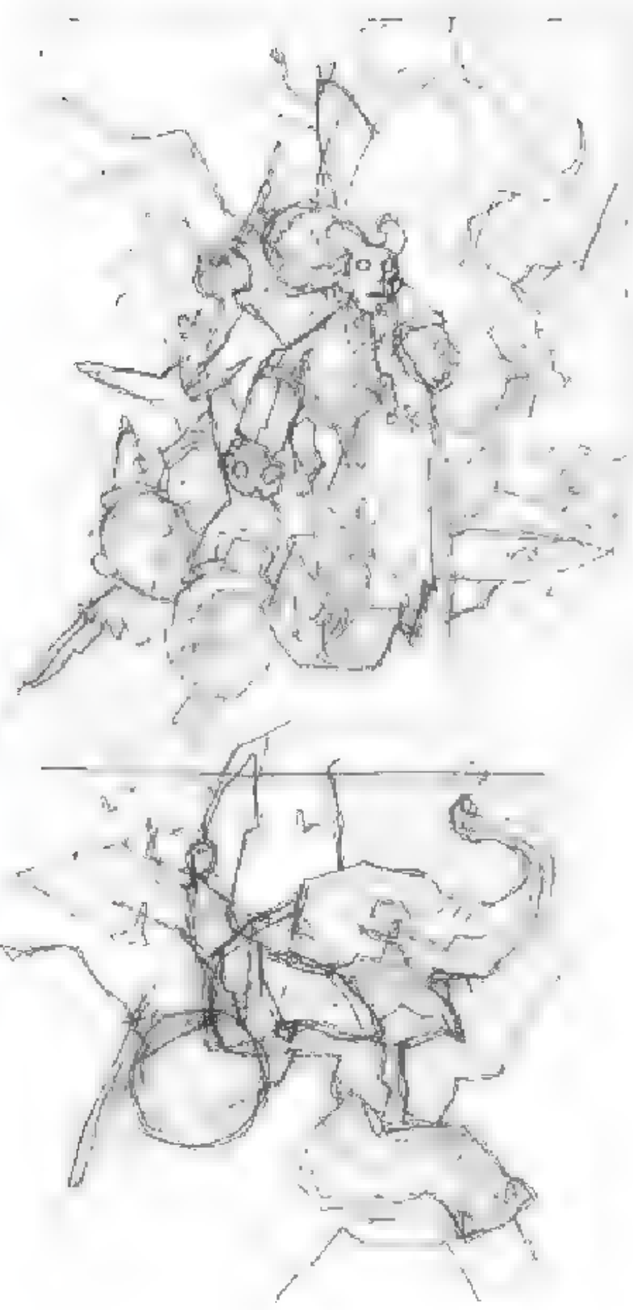
PROSECUTION: Tried everyone's patience, you mean.

IN THE DOCK NEXT TIME:
***Amazons Attack!**, Wonder Woman's least wonderful hour.*

"I'll never live long enough to tell all the Hellboy stories that could be told..."

THE WRITE HAND OF DOOM

Hellboy has just turned 20 and a hellraising couple of decades it's been too, as the Great Beast's creator, Mike Mignola, tells **Michael Molcher**



Above: Front cover sketches for *Hellboy The Midnight Circus*
Left: The first drawing of Hellboy, way back in 1991

More than two decades ago, artist Mike Mignola sat at a convention and produced a sketch of a demon with the name "Hellboy" written on its belt. Little did he know that this small red devil, albeit changed considerably, would not only go on to become one of comics' most recognisable characters but also spawn two movie adaptations and inspire an ever-growing line of ongoing "Mignolaverse" spin-off titles.

Despite technically being dead and battling his way through Hell, the creator-owned cigar-chomping, beer-swilling, gun-toting, grumpy occult investigator with the snapped-off horns celebrated his 20th birthday in March with a series of international events organised by publishers Dark Horse and a deluxe art book.

The character has dominated and defined the career of his creator, an affable and talkative Californian who, in the early '90s, took the bold move of quitting the big publishers and is now an industry legend. *Comic Heroes* caught up with Mignola as he prepared to celebrate the anniversary of his most popular creation.

CH: Did you have any idea back when you first came up with that initial sketch that it would continue and evolve as it has?

MM: "Not the slightest clue. I mean honestly I've never been terribly optimistic so I didn't expect it to go past the first miniseries. I designed it in such a way that if it worked I had plenty of things to do with it but I didn't want to get my hopes up. I knew it was a kind of an odd comic and I was prepared to go back to DC or do something else at Dark Horse. So I figured it was my one shot and hoped for the best but didn't expect too much."

CH: At what point did you realise that *Hellboy* was bigger than one miniseries?

MM: "The third story, 'The Corpse', was the first one that I felt really worked. That was the one that I probably had the most fun with. For the third story, 'Wake The Devil', I trotted out a lot more stuff which meant I wasn't going to wrap that story up really neat and clean, because by then I had the sense that it was working well enough – that I could continue doing it – so I wasn't afraid to put a lot of pieces out there that I'd continue to build on."

CH: The whole strip has been packed with esoteric and Fortean detail. How much have your own personal interests fed into the stories over the years?

MM: "I've been a horror guy since I was 12 or 13 years old so the whole point of doing the Hellboy thing was to take all the things I liked – the kind of stuff I read, the kind of movies that I watched – and cram all that into a book. There's a lot of me in there, there's a lot of my interests. I didn't create a book that was anything other than me looking for an excuse to draw the stuff that I like."

CH: Hellboy's character has evolved over time, but how has he and the series changed you as a person and as a creator?

MM: "Well, I've been very spoiled. I mean for 20 years now I have been left pretty much alone to do whatever the hell I want, so certainly when I compare notes with other artists of my generation and hear the stories about dealing with this company or that company, I don't have much to say because I've had a pretty smooth ride! I've found a great home at Dark Horse. It didn't sell huge numbers but it was enough that they left me alone to do whatever I wanted. I think that's the biggest difference: I've been living in this kind of get-to-do-whatever-you-want dream world for 20 years."

CH: That's an incredible privilege for any creator and very rare...

MM: "It's *very* rare. I guess I didn't realise how rare it is. When it's your day-in-day-out reality then you take it a bit for granted until, again, you start talking to other guys and hear about the troubles they're »

All images © Mike Mignola

having, bouncing from company to company for years. You realise, 'Oh yeah, that hasn't been my problem for 20 years.' I did 10 years of mainstream comics before I did *Hellboy* and that's why I really do appreciate the nice spot I'm in but it just becomes your normal thing."

CH: Have you had lots of support from Dark Horse?

MM: "They've been very, very supportive. It was an odd comic that didn't sell gigantic numbers but at no point did anybody at Dark Horse ever come to me and say, 'Maybe you should do something else,' or, 'Maybe it would be better if the book were more like this.' Or even 'Could you put it out more often?' when it *did* start to sell. They've really let me build it the way I've wanted to build it.

"And when it did start to sell they didn't ask me to add more books. Everything that's been added and spun off has all been my idea. I haven't asked for too much so I've never run into a spot where I've asked for something and they've said, 'No, you can't have it.' I just appreciate that they've let me do what I want to do."

CH: Has Hellboy become a person in his own right over the past two decades?

MM: "That happened really early on. The original *Hellboy* story and the original idea of the series was that you would never get into who this guy was, there's a couple pages of the first comic where you get his origin – at least as much as you were going to get, him appearing on Earth and then cut to 50 years later and he's fully grown and you treat him like he's a regular guy.

"I thought that would be the gag: that we don't explore who he is. But really quickly, even by the end of that first series, I was starting to see there was so much more interesting stuff to be mined about who he was and that kind of took over the book. Which is why the other supporting characters got squeezed out really quickly; he took over the comic.

"Especially that second miniseries. I started trotting out the, 'You're the Beast of the Apocalypse' nonsense, which I'd never planned. I just had a fight scene between him and this other character and I had nothing for them to talk about. So it's strange when characters start saying stuff that you didn't really expect... and then the whole thing starts taking on a life of its own and it's as if the dominoes have started falling and you think, 'Oh, you're going to fall that way rather than this way, that's not what I expected.'

"To keep this thing alive and organic you can steer it a little bit but you need to give it room for where it wants to go."

Above left: Trickster print, with colours by Dave Stewart, 2012
Above: Original line art from 2004's *The Goon* #7, a Hellboy team up with Eric Powell's Goon
Opposite: Unfinished Hellboy watercolour painting

CH: One "character" that has grown much bigger is the Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense (BPRD), to the point where it now has its own title. Have you enjoyed fleshing out those characters?

MM: "A lot of that credit's got to go to John Arcudi. Hiring him was one of the smartest decisions I ever made. Like I said, these characters had got squeezed out of the regular comic and there just wasn't going to be room to develop them, and then really early on I brought John in – I'm a big fan of his writing – and I had a rough sketch of who these characters were but for the most part I didn't really know where these guys were going.

"So it was wonderful to turn these characters over to John and have him really develop them as people. I'm still credited as writing *BPRD* but for the most part my »

co-writing with John is having conversations about the general direction of the book and especially what's going to happen to the world. John is a great writer of character so he's done a wonderful job of evolving these guys. I'll come up with the broad strokes – things that we're going to do – but John deals with it on a real human level.

"Now Abe Sapien has also spun off into his own title. Scott Allie has taken Abe and developed him in a particular direction. Scott's been the editor on *Hellboy* almost from the very beginning; again, a guy who's very familiar with these characters."

CH: Have they taken things in directions that have surprised you?

MM: "I'm not surprised, because I knew what they would both bring to the series, but I'm very happy because everything has worked out better than I could have possibly imagined. But there really aren't huge surprises with the characters because we do talk about this stuff and I'm one of those long-range guys, so I'm talking 10 years down the road.

"I guess I'm always a little surprised that they put up with me because I do meddle with their stuff, but my approach is to discuss with them and then give them a lot of room to get to these places the way they want to get there. I don't see any reason for hiring really good writers and then telling them how to write, so I try to keep it very organic between the three of us and agree on where things should go but give them room to do it their way.

"One of the real beauties, and why this thing has worked for 20 years, is that I've had a couple of guys come in for short stints but for the most part it's been the three of us running this whole show, so you don't get what you get with a lot of mainstream comics where every couple of years, or months even, you have a different writer coming in with a different vision. We've been able to tell one consistent story."

CH: What's it been like watching other artists, such as Duncan Fegredo and Guy Davis, bring their own interpretations to Hellboy's world?

MM: "That is, again, something I certainly never anticipated when I started. It was always just going to be me. When it came to spinning off the BPRD we had other guys do it but Guy was always somebody I'd had in mind; I'd been an admirer of his work for years and knew he was one of the best creature guys, if not the best creature guy, in comics so it was a no-brainer to get him for that book. I'm so thrilled that we had him as long as we did and between him and Jon they really built *BPRD* into what it is now.

"With *BPRD* it was wide open as far as what that book could look like – I just needed someone great on it. *Hellboy* was a different story because I never thought I would hand over the reins of drawing to someone else. Because of what *Hellboy* is and because it's so *my* sensibility it was trickier to find an artist that wouldn't imitate me but drew in a similar way. In fact we had another artist who was supposed to do it, he bailed out and it was just such luck that the only other guy we had in mind was Duncan. He said yes, and already a lot of that story was going to be about England and King Arthur, and folklore and mythology, so having a guy who was in England and could really sell the landscape and the architecture was ideal."

Above: Sketches for an unfinished Hellboy paint ng

CH: One person who maybe doesn't get enough credit is colourist Dave Stewart. He's brought a remarkable consistency to the whole series...

MM: "I think you're right; he probably doesn't get enough credit. In the art book that we have coming out Dave is on the list of the guys I thank and I think I say something like he's the glue that holds the whole thing together. Not only does he give a certain kind of consistency he's so flexible. He colours every artist on this stuff differently – the way they should be coloured. He's got this amazing ability and he'll colour Duncan differently to how he colours me and differently to how he colours Guy Davis and Laurence Campbell. He adjusts his technique for everybody but there is a kind of beautiful unifying thing that ties everything together. So yeah, Dave is kind of the invisible glue that keeps it all together. I shudder at the thought of ever having to do this stuff without him."

CH: Coming back to the character of Hellboy, a prominent theme – especially with *Hellboy In Hell* – is obligation and duty, personal choice and rebelling against fate. Is this something you feel passionately about?

MM: "Y'know, it's not the kind of thing I consciously think about, it's just kind of what came up in the book. I still think of it as an adventure story and an excuse to draw

"How do you end a character you've already killed?!"

the things I want to draw. But there is a thing that happens with this character relatively early on, as you start coughing up this prophecy and that prophecy; it does inform the character and how he's going to deal with different situations.

"At various times I've regretted the hell out of turning him into the Beast of the Apocalypse and giving him this doomed thing he's got to do. You see it in various stories where I rebel against it and I think there's even one where Hellboy says, 'That's it! I don't even wanna talk about it, I don't wanna think about it!' That's me! That's me saying, 'I should never have opened this can of worms, that's an end of it!'

"But every time we try to put a lid on it I kind of think, 'Except he's still got to do this... and this kind of relates to that...' and so it keeps coming back and taking over.

"What I really want to do is give Hellboy a break and find a way to get him out of this jam I've got him into, so he can just retire to a nice corner of Hell where there are libraries and a nice old house for him to live in with a well-stocked bar! That's the goal – to get him there eventually – but he still has some big hoops to jump through."

CH: Of course, while this goes on the world of the BPRD is collapsing into Armageddon. Do you have an end in mind?

MM: "Yes, there is a very definite end to the situation on Earth. It's hard to come up with an end for Hellboy, though I do have a certain kind of an ending. But I've already killed him – how do you end a character you've already killed off? So it's an interesting situation to be dealing with, essentially, a disembodied spirit.

"The apocalyptic Earth thing is definitely something that Scott, Jon and I have mapped out and we've known where we're going for quite a while now. There's still a lot of wiggle room, but for years now I've known where this thing was supposed to go and I think it will make for a very interesting book when it's all done. You see a lot of books that take place in a post-apocalyptic world but here you really get to see that stuff snowball. With the first however-many-years of this book the world's got some troubles but they're being dealt with, then the trouble gets kind of big and then it snowballs, and suddenly everything's crashing around our ears. I think when it's a complete work it will be an interesting thing to see, in some ways, the destruction but also the evolution of a world."

CH: It's interesting for you to say you look back at the complete story. Do you envisage a time when you're going to put away your pencils and inks and bid farewell to *Hellboy*?

MM: "I can't imagine moving onto something else because it'd be a lot of work to build something else and, as I said, it's hard to put away Hellboy because he's already dead. He's the perfect vehicle and certainly this world I'm creating in the *Hellboy In Hell* stuff is the perfect setting for the kind of stories I want to do.

"I guess there's a time as far as *BPRD* goes when you might go, 'Well, we've kind of run out of room here.' We do have an ending; it's not coming super-quick but it's coming soon enough that we've planned how it's going to go. It's nice to be able to write and develop it, knowing where it's going.

"So yeah, I do imagine a time when parts of this world are kind of complete .. but at the same time there's so much of Hellboy's past. He's been roaming around the world for some 60-odd years so there's a lot of room – and I've always told those flashback stories. There's no way I'm going to live long enough to tell all the stories there are to tell about Hellboy and the BPRD, let alone the continuing adventures of him in Hell."

CH: *Hellboy* has dominated your career. Are there things you wish you could have worked on but couldn't?

MM: "That's kind of funny because I always thought that would be the case. As a guy who never really did a project for more than a year, I was always keenly aware that if I committed to one thing I'd miss another thing or some other book would come along But for whatever reason, when I started *Hellboy* – maybe because I didn't get a lot of job offers – almost from the very beginning I've been having so much fun doing it that nothing else seemed appealing.

"I've stepped away to do a couple of things and I've worked on the movies, but really, since I started *Hellboy* I've always known I've got the best day job. It's fun to do something else for a couple of days but I'm always thinking, 'That was fun, that was enough, I want to get back to working on *Hellboy*.' Like I said, I can do what I want, and it's hard for somebody to offer you a better job than that!"

Above: HP Lovecraft Film Festival & CthulhuCon poster art, with colours by Dave Stewart 2008

*To celebrate the 20th anniversary of **Hellboy**, Dark Horse has released an all-new sampler comic featuring two classic Mignola tales, "The Ghoul" and "Another Day At The Office", as well as two new stories by Mignola, Fabio Moon and R Sikoryak. **Hellboy: The First 20 Years**, the hardcover collection from which these images are taken, is also out now.*

SHOCK & AWE

THE TOP 25 COMIC BOOK SHOCKS

From heroic sacrifice to out-of-nowhere betrayal, from game-changing new concepts to shameless tearjerkers, comics revel in "Did-you-see-that?!" shock moments. **Matt Bielby** talks you through our favourites

The comic book universe heaves with shock moments, of course: the unexpected return of a villain, the betrayal of a friend, the this-can't-be-happening death of a much-loved character – but most comics go out of their way to make sure that *nothing really happens* too. (After all, how can Peter Parker remain a hard-luck everyman when he's married to a supermodel? He can't, and periodically all such blind alleys must be swept aside.)

You'd think this "nothing's actually permanent" thing would strip comics of their drama somewhat, but it doesn't seem to. The medium's still packed with "Wow!" moments, scenes or ideas that knock us off our feet. A quarter century of our favourites follow, but first, a few notes on the list.

"The medium's packed with "Wow!" moments that knock us off our feet"

1 We decided early on that origins stories can't count; whatever surprising events they may contain, they're not so much shock revelation as necessary set-up for the adventures ahead.

2 As we're not talking cool moments per se, many of your favourites are sure to be missing – so great though it is, don't expect to find "Ultron, we would have words with thee."

3 As we don't wish to be merely a funeral cortege, many of the major superhero "deaths" have been skipped over.

4 We've largely avoided shock moments from standalone series such as *The Walking Dead* because, well, you're either reading them or you're not. What happens here has little impact on those who haven't already leapt aboard. Similarly, the 1986 Basran Disaster in *Roy Of The Rovers*, or the "Twilight" reveal in *Buffy* Season Eight.

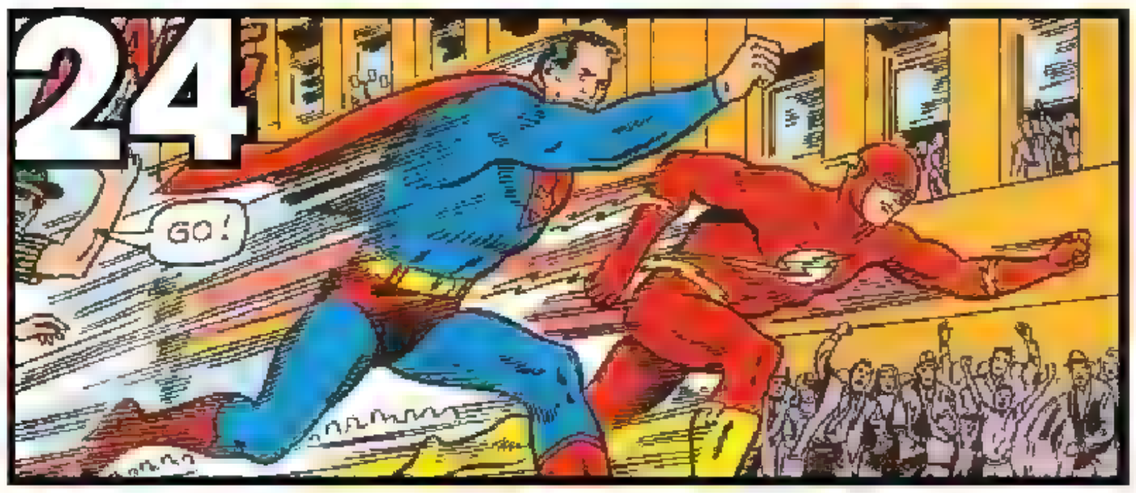
5 Finally, we've tried to avoid those gross-out moments whose only real desire is to shock. Some day we may do a list that includes Sue Dibney's rape in *Identity Crisis* or Gwen Stacy having sex with the Green Goblin, but not today.

Robin becomes Nightwing

Tales Of The Teen Titans #44, July 1984

WHAT HAPPENED? Superman had occasionally posed as the Batman-like Nightwing, a modern incarnation of an ancient Kryptonian hero, since the early '60s; when the teenage Dick Grayson shed his Robin tights for the last time, he took his new inspiration here.

WHY WAS IT SHOCKING? Superheroes are always coming up with new identities – Captain America turns into Nomad in the mid-'70s, say – but it never lasts; with Nightwing it did. Grayson snatched a new role and never looked back – and the medium's urge to periodically hit the reset button suddenly looked thrillingly wobbly. It seems some things *can* change for good...



Who is the Fastest Man Alive?

Superman #199, August 1967

WHAT HAPPENED? Fans like nothing better than arguing about who's stronger or who's faster – Hulk or Thor? Superman or Flash? – and 16-year-old writer Jim Shooter knew there was power in giving them what they wanted, as he did in this first ever race between the two. There were even rules – Superman couldn't fly, for instance.

WHY WAS IT SHOCKING? Though the race – after much shenanigans – ended in a dead-heat, the rematches have kept coming, almost all similarly inconclusive. But who cares? It's the promise of the concept that counts.

Death of Superman

Superman #75, January 1993

WHAT HAPPENED? We all knew from the outset that the big, dumb, every-page-a-splash-panel fight that would "kill" Superman was a put-up job.

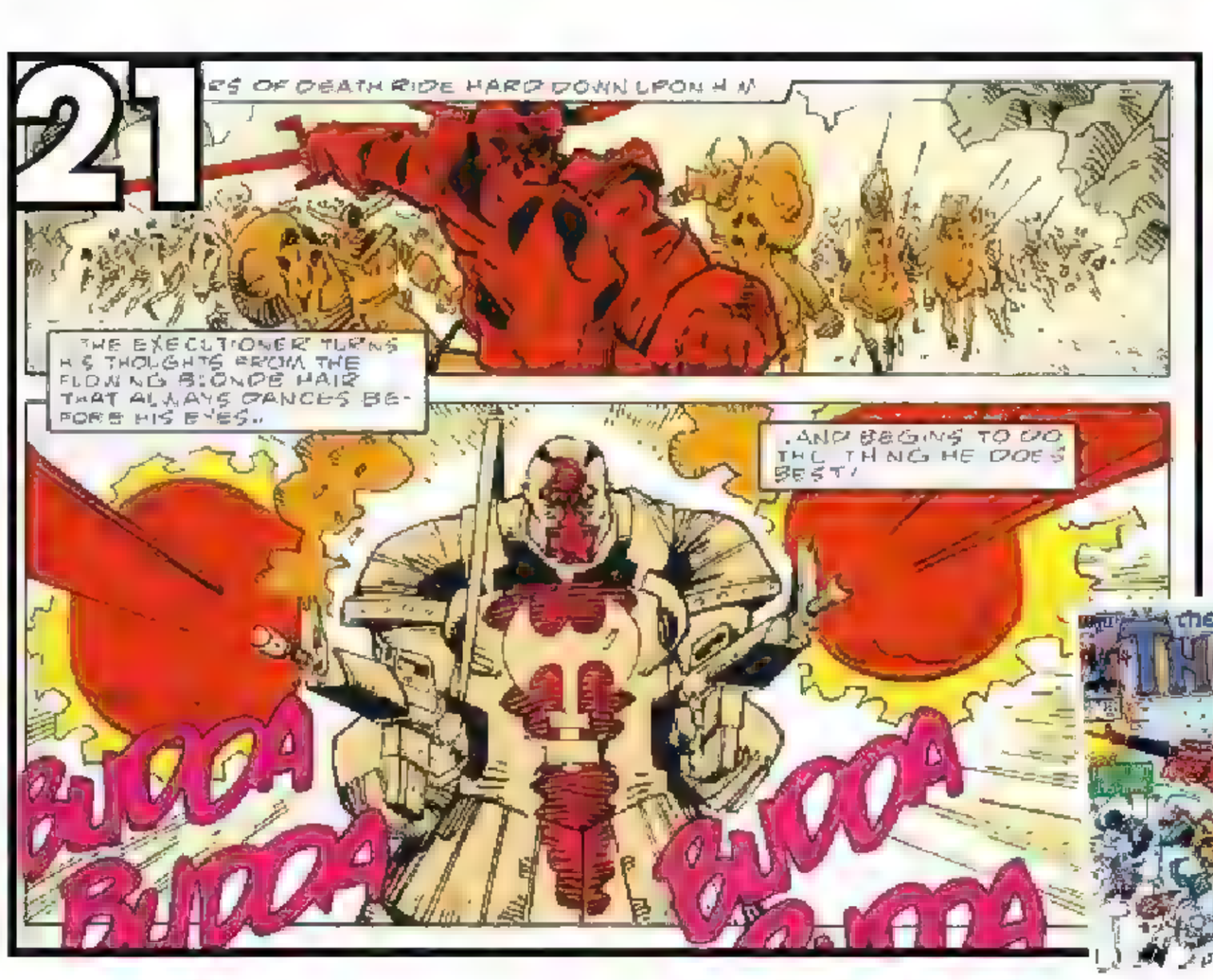
WHY WAS IT SHOCKING? The ultra-conservative DC creative team played everything exactly as expected but it sold in a way nobody'd predicted, and laid the groundwork for a questionable future – soon Batman's back would shatter, Spider-Man would be a clone, and event storylines would rule.

Bucky's secret history

Captain America Vol. 5 #11, November 2005

WHAT HAPPENED? Survivor guilt over the death of Captain America's old WW2 teen sidekick, Bucky Barnes, had long helped define Winghead's modern-day character; now, in an extended storyline, Bucky is revealed to have survived as super-assassin, the Winter Soldier.

WHY WAS IT SHOCKING? "No one stays dead except Bucky, Jason Todd and Uncle Ben," used to be comic shop wisdom, but 2005 saw the return of both Cap and Batman's old kid sidekicks – and, in Bucky's case at least, no one complained. The build-up, and the logic behind it, was simply too masterful.

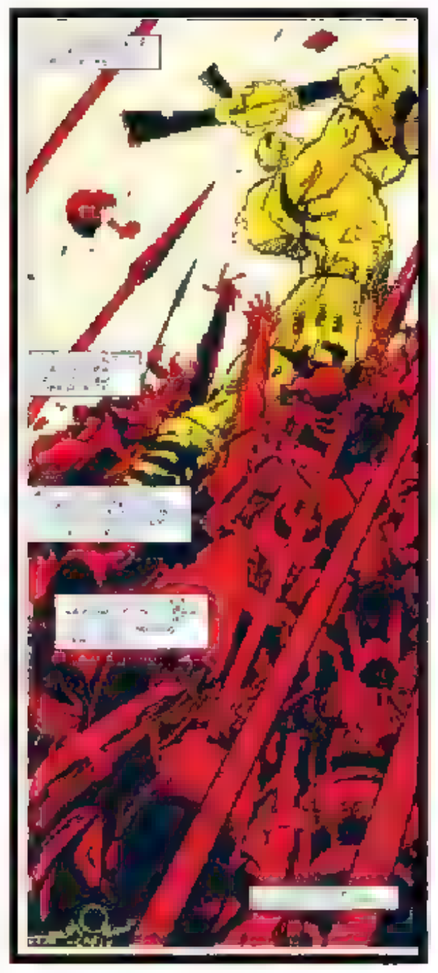

21
THE EXECUTIONER TURNS HIS THOUGHTS FROM THE FLOWING BLONDE HAIR THAT ALWAYS DANCES BEFORE HIS EYES..
..AND BEGINS TO DO THE THING HE DOES BEST!
BLOCCA
BLOCCA
BLOCCA

He stood alone at Gjallerbru

The Mighty Thor #362, December 1985

WHAT HAPPENED? Comics rarely do those trendy "bad men you have a sneaking regard for" as successfully as *Game Of Thrones*, *Breaking Bad*, et al, but here's one: Skurge the Executioner, Thor bruiser from the early '60s, redeemed in battle against the forces of Hela in one of the most memorable scenes from the epic Walt Simonson run.

WHY WAS IT SHOCKING? Because it's so easy to believe that there are good and bad characters, and there's an end to it. The death of Skurge proves they can all be good characters – if handled right. »



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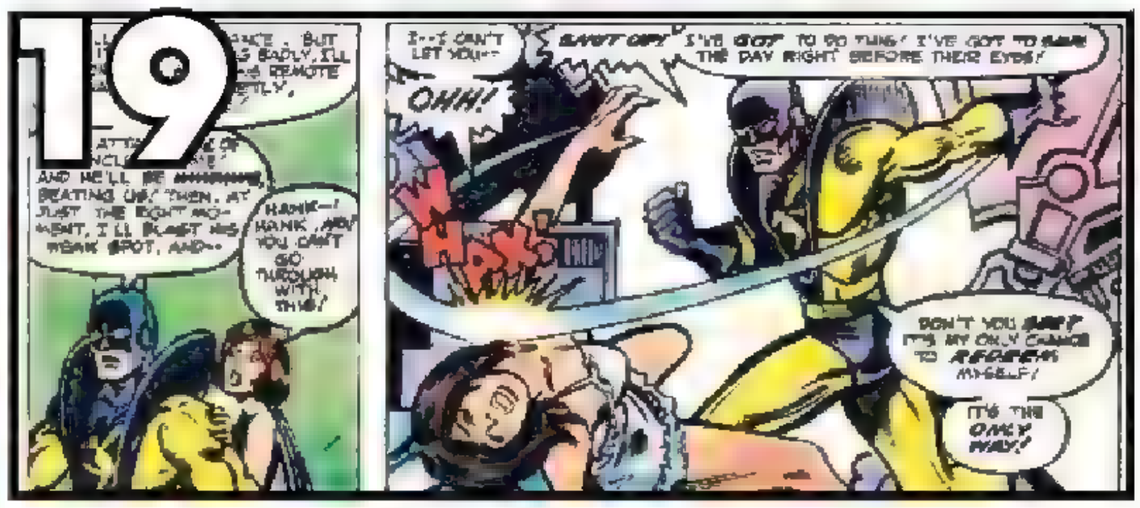
Eat this, Steranko!

The Ultimates 2 #13, February 2007

WHAT HAPPENED? At its best, Marvel's Ultimate Universe told striking, smart, hard-edged re-imaginings of the core Marvel characters and events; at its worst it was a controversy factory, littering its tales with mutilation and rape. So let's pick one of the line's gobsmacking moments that didn't leave a foul taste in the mouth: the awesome eight-page fold-out spread of everybody fighting everybody else in the rain from the shock-happy Mark Millar/Bryan Hitch team.

WHY WAS IT SHOCKING? In these decompressed times, comics often pretend to be cable TV shows and forget they can do things other mediums can't. This spread is pure comics, like your average multiplex screen expanding to IMAX size for a single shot, then retracting again – but better!


19
AND HE'LL BE MASSACRING, BEATING US/ THEN, AT JUST THE RIGHT MOMENT, I'LL BLAST HIS WEAK SPOT, AND--
HANK--! HANK, NOW YOU CAN'T GO THROUGH WITH THIS!
I--I CAN'T LET YOU--
SHUT OFF! I'VE GOT TO DO THIS! I'VE GOT TO SAVE THE DAY RIGHT BEFORE THEIR EYES!
OHH!
WHAK
DON'T YOU SEE? IT'S MY ONLY CHANCE TO REDEEM MYSELF!
IT'S THE ONLY WAY!

Hank Pym, wife-beater

Avengers #213, November 1981

WHAT HAPPENED? Though a founding Avenger, Hank Pym's career has been littered with failure and mistakes, even mental illness. When writer Jim Shooter decided to show the collapse of his marriage to the Wasp, their row was meant to climax with a mere "get away from me" gesture – but, as drawn by artist Bob Hall, it became much more dramatic and repulsive than that.

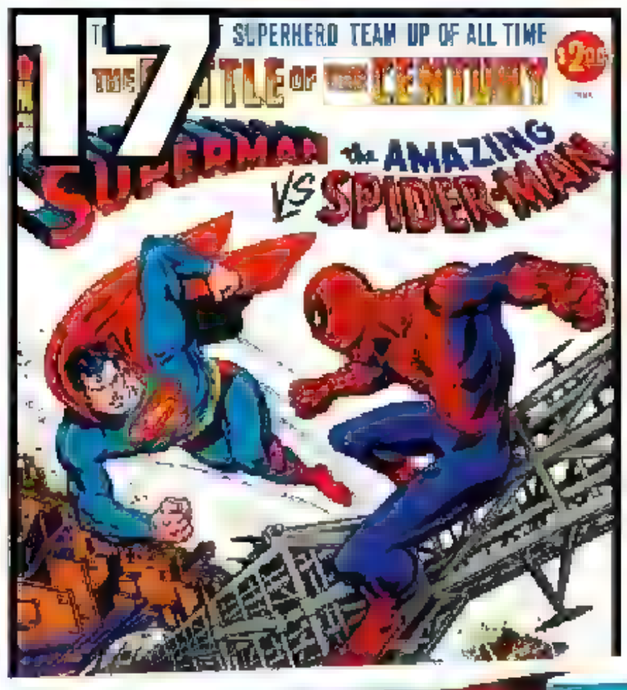
WHY WAS IT SHOCKING? Any number of superheroes have been depicted as slap happy on occasion, but with Pym the mud has stuck – and how.

Mucky business

Swamp Thing Vol. 2 #34, March 1985

WHAT HAPPENED? Swamp Thing, a non-human vegetable-monster, and pretty, badger-haired Abby Cable have hallucinogenic, back-to-nature sex for an entire issue; in a list where death rules, and sexuality tends towards the rapey end of the spectrum, how refreshing to have a gobsmacking game-changer of a moment that's essentially joyous…

WHY WAS IT SHOCKING? "What, you want me to, uh… eat it?" says Abby. She's talking about a tuber he's plucked from his chest, kind of…

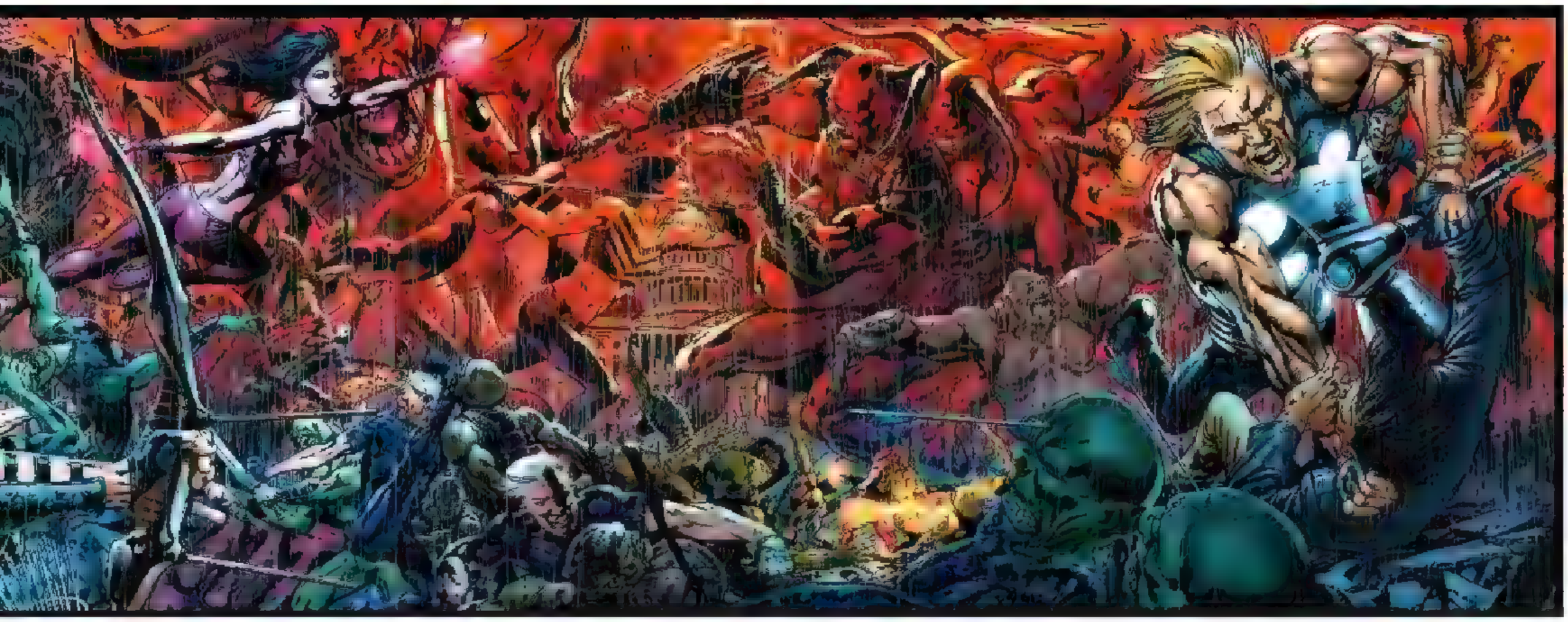


The Battle of the Century

Superman Vs The Amazing Spider-Man, 1976

WHAT HAPPENED? The biggest comic of 1976 – both physically and in terms of impact – brought two superheroes together we thought would never meet. It's by-the-numbers stuff, in a sense, but scenes and images from it linger long in the memory nevertheless.

WHY WAS IT SHOCKING? The first crossover between Marvel and DC shouts louder than most about the excitement the medium can offer: anything can happen here, it said, if we can think of it and we can draw it.



"Now it's my turn!"

Uncanny X-Men #132, April 1980

WHAT HAPPENED? Feisty X-Man Wolverine, not yet the superstar he will become, clambers out of a filthy sewer. Far from dead, he's about to open a can of whoop-ass on the Hellfire Club – and soon every bad guy in the Marvel U.

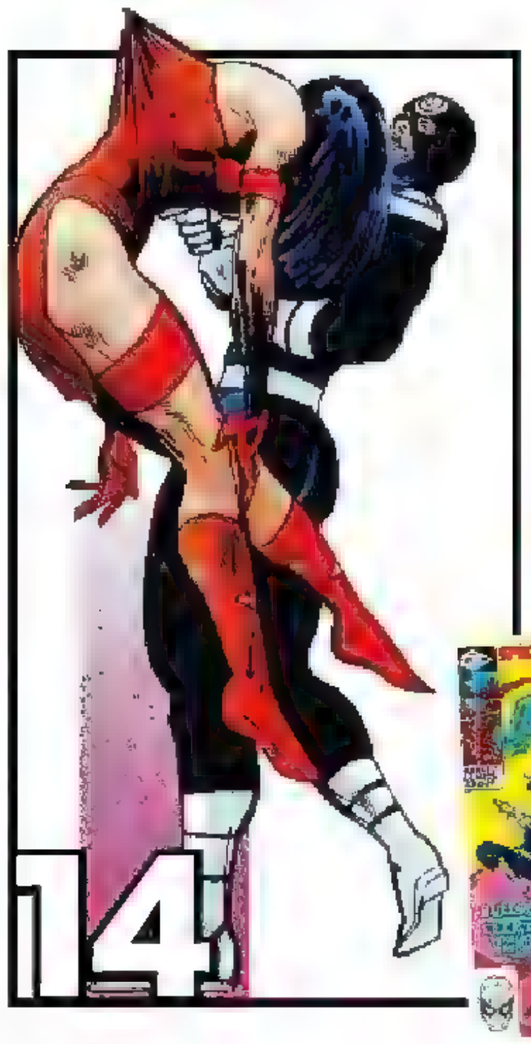
WHY WAS IT SHOCKING? This was where Wolverine became a star; the era of the "killer hero" had begun, ramming home the violent, noble outsider shtick seemingly required to make an '80s good guy "cool".

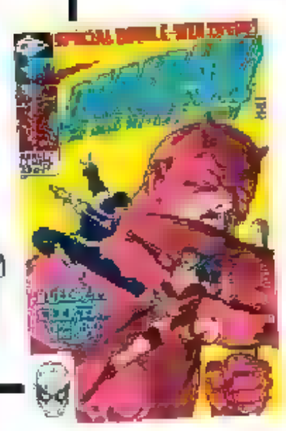
Spider-Man no more!

Amazing Spider-Man #50, July 1967

WHAT HAPPENED? In this done-in-one issue by Lee and Romita, Peter Parker realises that being Spidey has brought him "nothing but unhappiness" and he dumps his outfit in a rainy alleyway dustbin in one unforgettable panel. It seems like a great idea for a while but, of course, fate lends a hand...

WHY WAS IT SHOCKING? The great '60s comics hold their power because they did stuff we'd never seen before, and we'd never seen a superhero give up their secret identity in so dramatic a fashion as this...





Ones wins. One dies

Daredevil #181, April 1982

WHAT HAPPENED? Bullseye, the premiere villain (Kingpin aside) of the Frank Miller *Daredevil* era, takes on ol' hornhead's mysteriously returned ninja ex-girlfriend Elektra – he slashes her throat, then skewers her on her own sai.

WHY WAS IT SHOCKING? *Daredevil* was the most acclaimed book on the shelves in this period, and this is the pivotal issue. With everything shown from Bullseye's highly unsympathetic point of view, Elektra – the hottest new character of the moment – becomes just one more meaningless obstacle in his way.

Reed Richards doesn't shave

Fantastic Four #49, April 1966

WHAT HAPPENED? Has there ever been a comic series as packed with gobsmacking moments as the Kirby/Lee *Fantastic Four*? This is the issue where we properly meet Galactus for the first time, and the one where it's hammered home just how serious a threat he is by a single memorable detail: Reed Richards hasn't had time to shave.

WHY WAS IT SHOCKING? Whether facing Doctor Doom or the Mole Man, Reed had always presented himself in respectably dapper fashion, but not this time. He pulls a desperate all-nighter in prep for the Big G, and looks dirty and sweaty and scared. This time, perhaps, we really are going to die...? »

HOW CAN YOU POSSIBLY CLAIM TO BE THE FLASH, BARRY ALLEN-- WHEN I--JAY GARRICK--AM THE FLASH--AND HAVE BEEN SO FOR MORE THAN 20 YEARS?!
12
FLASH

"Flash of Two Worlds!"

The Flash #123, Sept 1961

WHAT HAPPENED? Attempting to appear invisible by vibrating his molecules at high speed, the Silver Age Barry Allen Flash is instead transported to another dimension, home of Golden Age Flash Jay Garrick, who Allen had always thought a fictional figure.

WHY WAS IT SHOCKING? It introduced Earth-Two, and the concept of the multiverse, to DC Comics; Golden Age heroes start to crop up everywhere, and things soon became very complicated indeed.

Doom Patrol doomed!

Doom Patrol #121, October 1968

WHAT HAPPENED? The four oddball heroes of DC's outcast team are offered a choice by an evil ex-Nazi: he'll either blow up their Caribbean island base, with them on it, or a small fishing village in Maine.

WHY WAS IT SHOCKING? Never before had titular heroes actually died in the pages of their own comic. The very last panel showed the creative team telling us that, yep, that really happened, and only a concerted letter-writing campaign could bring the characters back to life.

Girlfriend in a refrigerator

Green Lantern Vol. 3 #54, August 1994

WHAT HAPPENED? In this notorious issue, fresh new GL Kyle Rayner finds his best girl Alicia murdered by sadistic bad guy Major Force (yes, really; it was the '90s), her broken body stuffed in his fridge.

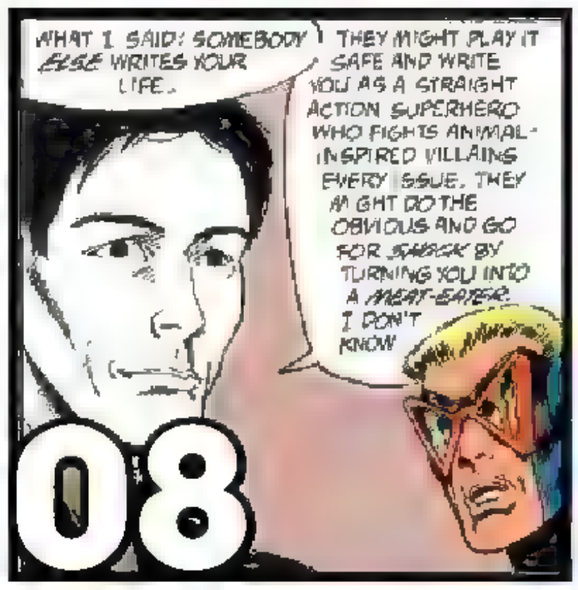
WHY WAS IT SHOCKING? Because the pop culture shorthand for depth and angst – having the hero's womenfolk abused terribly – has rarely been so cynically pressed into service. Comic book writer Gail Simone's "Women in Refrigerators Syndrome" began here; the awful thing is, we could probably fill out the entire 25 with unedifying incidents such as this.

Terra turns traitor

The New Teen Titans #34, August 1983

WHAT HAPPENED? Freshfaced young superheroine Terra had spent months getting "in" with the Teen Titans – DC's smash hit revival of an old "sidekick gang" , now rivalling the dominant *X-Men* for sales and drama – even battling their most formidable enemy, Deathstroke the Terminator, to prove herself. But now, with a secretive meeting in a Brooklyn tenement, she's revealed to have been Deathstroke's partner all along!

WHY WAS IT SHOCKING? This sort of gobsmacking expectation-reversal doesn't seem particularly clever today, but early '80s DC simply didn't pull stuff like this. And it set up the Titan's most celebrated storyline, "The Judas Contract", perfectly.


WHAT I SAID: SOMEBODY ELSE WRITES YOUR LIFE.
THEY MIGHT PLAY IT SAFE AND WRITE YOU AS A STRAIGHT ACTION SUPERHERO WHO FIGHTS ANIMAL-INSPIRED VILLAINS EVERY ISSUE. THEY MIGHT DO THE OBVIOUS AND GO FOR SHOCK BY TURNING YOU INTO A MEAT-EATER. I DON'T KNOW!
08

Animal Man makes a house call

Animal Man #25-26, July-August 1990

WHAT HAPPENED? During the late '80s invasion of young British writers to American comics, Grant Morrison took obscure mid-'60s creation Animal Man – a guy given the power to borrow the abilities of nearby beasts – and made him unique. Now an everyman operating on the edge of the superhero world, his adventures became increasingly harrowing and "meta" until, towards the end, Morrison has our hero rock up at the writer's very house, where they have a chat about why so many awful things have happened to him and his family lately – it was all in the service of drama.

WHY WAS IT SHOCKING? This book had throughout been saddled with exceptionally ordinary superhero art, but had become a minor hit all the same – and why? The invention of its writer alone. The balance of power had shifted in mainstream comics.

First ever meeting of the Justice Society

All Star Comics #3, November 1940

WHAT HAPPENED? A bunch of guys sat around the table in a wood-panelled clubhouse. But wait! This was something new: the world's first superhero team.

WHY WAS IT SHOCKING? The first ever JSA adventure isn't just about thrills, but also the camaraderie that's at the core of the superteam's appeal.

FUNNY HOW I CAN'T GET GWEN OUT OF MY MIND LATELY!
SOMETHING TELLS ME SHE KINDA LIKES ME!
I NEVER REALLY DID EVER GET TO KNOW HER!
BUT ONCE I GET THIS MARY JANE ORDEAL OVER WITH...
PETER'S ALL WRAPPED IN THOUGHT! HE MUST BE SO EAGER TO MEET MARY JANE!
PETER PARKER, I'D LIKE YOU TO MEET MY NIECE...
YOU MEAN ... THAT'S MARY JANE...?!!
FACE IT, TIGER...
YOU JUST HIT THE JACKPOT!
06

Face it, Tiger...

Amazing Spider-Man #42, November 1966

WHAT HAPPENED? One of the duller issues of early *Spider-Man* redeems itself on its last page with the full introduction of the cocky, gorgeous Mary Jane Watson, long hinted at but never before seen, who hits Peter Parker's life like a cannonball. The first time we see her face it's one of the most famous, quotable panels in comics: "Face it, Tiger... You just hit the jackpot!"

WHY WAS IT SHOCKING? Because the build-up to this girl had been so drawn out. Because soap opera mattered to *Spider-Man* as much as fights ever did. Because Peter had worried she would be awful, and – as drawn by John Romita, master of the dreamy chick – she was anything but.

Captain Mar-Vell dies

The Death Of Captain Marvel, April 1982

WHAT HAPPENED? Marvel's original Captain Marvel had never been exactly A-list, but he'd had his moments – not least a thrilling, psychedelic run by a young writer-artist called Jim Starlin. But it's with his death that he achieved greatness. In Marvel's first ever graphic novel, he succumbed quietly to cancer; despite dozens of superheroes and villains showing up to pay respects, there's barely a harsh word in the entire thing. Starlin's own father was battling cancer at the time, and it shows.

WHY WAS IT SHOCKING? There's no bombast; just sadness mixed with the celebration of a life well lived. Next to this, most superhero deaths seem stupid, bombastic and dull.

"IT WORKS FINE, ASSUMING YOU WANT THINGS TO EXPLODE ON ARRIVAL"
"TELEPORTED TO NEW YORK, ANY CREATURE'S DEATH WOULD TRIGGER MECHANISMS WITHIN ITS MASSIVE BRAIN, CLONED FROM A HUMAN SENSITIVE"
"...THE RESULTANT PSYCHIC SHOCKWAVE KILLING HALF THE CITY."
ADRIAN I'M SORRY...YOU NEED HELP I KNOW THIS "HALF NEW YORK" STUFF'S BULLSHIT, BUT I'M STILL GLAD WE GOT HERE BEFORE YOU GOT DEEPER INTO THIS MESS
CHRIST, YOU DEFINITELY PLANNED ALL THIS MAD SCIENTIST STUFF.
"I MEAN WHEN WAS THIS HOPELESS BLACK FANTASY SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN?"
"WHEN WERE YOU PLANNING TO DO IT?"
POLICE
26

"DO IT?"
DAN I'M NOT A REPUBLIC SERIAL VILLAIN. DO YOU SERIOUSLY THINK I'D EXPLAIN MY MASTERSTROKE IF THERE REMAINED THE SLIGHTEST CHANCE OF YOU AFFECTING ITS OUTCOME?
I DID IT THIRTY-FIVE MINUTES AGO
04

"I did it 35 minutes ago"

Watchmen #11, August 1987

WHAT HAPPENED? We'd never enjoyed an extended superhero Whodunnit? like *Watchmen* before, and it all built up to this: the final confrontation between dogged everyman hero Nite Owl and his psycho sidekick Rorschach, and an ex-teammate who'd now revealed himself to be the Big Bad, the super-rich Adrian Veidt. Our two sorry heroes think they've stopped his scheme to prevent seemingly inevitable nuclear war by providing the whole planet with an external menace to fight: a cooked-up alien invasion. Trouble is, the plan involves murdering half New York. "When were you planning to do it?" our heroes ask. "Do you seriously think I'd explain my masterstroke if there remained the slightest chance of you affecting its outcome?" comes the answer. "I did it 35 minutes ago."

WHY WAS IT SHOCKING? Superheroes have never been shown to be quite so impotent before. Here they bumbled along, uncovered some things, but were never remotely close to winning – in the end, the only thing they've done is fail to prevent the villain from saving the world.

IF EVEN ONE MORE PERSON DIED AT MY HANDS...
IT'S BETTER THIS WAY. QUICK. CLEAN. FINAL.
I LOVE YOU, SCOTT
A PART OF ME WILL ALWAYS BE WITH YOU.
JEAN, NO DON'T!
NO!
SCOTT!
JEAN!
YOU, PLANNED THIS, DIDN'T YOU?! FROM THE MOMENT WE LANDED ON THE MOON, YOU SHIELDED YOUR INTENTIONS FROM OUR RAPPORT, BUT JUST THE SAME I SHOULD HAVE GUESSED, I SHOULD HAVE REALIZED...
THAT YOU COULD NOT BECOME DARK PHOENIX AND REMAIN TRUE TO YOUR SELF, THE JEAN GREY I KNEW, AND FELL IN LOVE WITH. SO, YOU TOOK STEPS TO ENSURE THAT, IF LILANDRA COULDN'T STOP YOU, YOU'D DO THE JOB YOURSELF.
YOU MUST HAVE PICKED THE MINDS OF THE KREE AND SKRULL OBSERVERS, LEARNED WHAT ANCIENT WEAPONS WERE HIDDEN HERE. THEN, YOU USED YOUR FIGHT WITH THE X-MEN TO DRAIN YOU OF ENOUGH ENERGY TO MAKE YOU VULNERABLE. AND, FINALLY, WHEN YOU WERE READY, YOU...
YOU
OH, JEAN
JEAN
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
75¢
THIS MARVEL COMIC COULD BE WORTH $2500 TO YOU!
SPECIAL DOUBLE-SIZE ISSUE!
X-MEN
PHOENIX MUST DIE!

03

Phoenix commits suicide

Uncanny X-Men #137, September 1980

WHAT HAPPENED? Everyone knows this one, of course: in one of the most celebrated, influential and constantly referenced storylines in comics, original X-Men Jean Grey's struggle with the awesome and unpredictable Phoenix power eventually turns this girl-next-door into a universe-threatening monster. The "Dark Phoenix Saga" ended in space trial-by-combat, climaxing when what remains of Jean engineering her own death by hidden sentry gun.

WHY WAS IT SHOCKING? Because everyone bought into the storyline. Because we all adored Jean. Because the build-up was so enthralling. And because her death was all anyone could talk about at the 1980 convention season that immediately followed the release of this issue – sales went through the roof, and fandom was aflame with anguish and anger. Back then you simply didn't kill off a major, successful superhero – but they'd done it. The revolving door of comic book death begins here...

02

Swamp Thing discovers who he isn't

Saga Of The Swamp Thing #21, February 1984

WHAT HAPPENED? With "The Anatomy Lesson", his first "proper" script for the struggling DC muck-monster who would make his name in America, Brit comics' god Alan Moore showed what a bit of poetry, a lot of invention and a determination to take any concept seriously can do. This is electric stuff, packed with atmosphere and twists, and revealing that our hero is not the transformed scientist Alec Holland at all...

WHY WAS IT SHOCKING? It showed how you can totally reinvent a character without negating anything that had gone before; it demonstrated that in this ostensibly visual medium, writers matter rather a lot, actually; and it shouted from the rooftops that "The British are coming!"

MARVEL COMICS GROUP
AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
TURNING POINT
I'M GOING TO GET YOU, GOBLIN! I'M GOING TO DESTROY YOU SLOWLY-- AND WHEN YOU START BEGGING FOR ME TO END IT--
--I'M GOING TO REMIND YOU OF ONE THING--
YOU'RE THE CREEP WHO'S GOING TO PAY!
--YOU KILLED THE WOMAN I LOVE--
AND FOR THAT, YOU'RE GOING TO DIE!
NO!
AT LAST, WE CAN TELL YOU THE TITLE TO OUR TALE, THOUGH IT'S ONE TITLE WE'D HOPED WE'D NEVER SEE, WE CALL IT--
THE NIGHT GWEN STACY DIED
--AND YOU CAN BE SURE THE STORY DOESN'T END HERE!
TO BE CONTINUED!
01

Amazing Spider-Man #121, June 1973

WHAT HAPPENED? Spider-Man and the Green Goblin's ongoing, increasingly unhinged rivalry came to horrifying, tragic conclusion when the Goblin captured Peter Parker's butter-wouldn't-melt girlfriend, the fragrant Gwen Stacy, then threw her off a New York bridge. Spidey's webbing makes a last-minute save, of course, except this time something approaching real-world physics kicks in: hidden below the heroic "Swik!" sound effect as the web snags Gwen's leg is a tiny "Snap!", her neck breaking from the jolt.

WHY WAS IT SHOCKING? For anyone brought up on the first electric decade or so of Marvel Comics – or, indeed, on the Silver Age in general, when most of the major comic book character and tropes we enjoy today were created or refined – *Amazing Spider-Man* #121-122 was like a full-on collision with a Mack truck. This was a defining moment, for golden girls like Gwen simply didn't die in comics. The heroes always saved them. Except Peter couldn't help Gwen. The repercussions continue, and the four-colour world changed, for better and for worse...

TEENAGE SIDEKICK

Having had his fill of the Dark Knight, Paul Pope tells **Stephen Jewell** why he's launching ambitious new graphic novel series *Battling Boy* and working with Brad Pitt

After putting his unique stamp on the dystopian vista of Gotham City in *Batman: Year 100* and on New York in his creator-owned Vertigo series *Heavy Liquid* and *100%*, Paul Pope was determined to explore a less familiar locale.

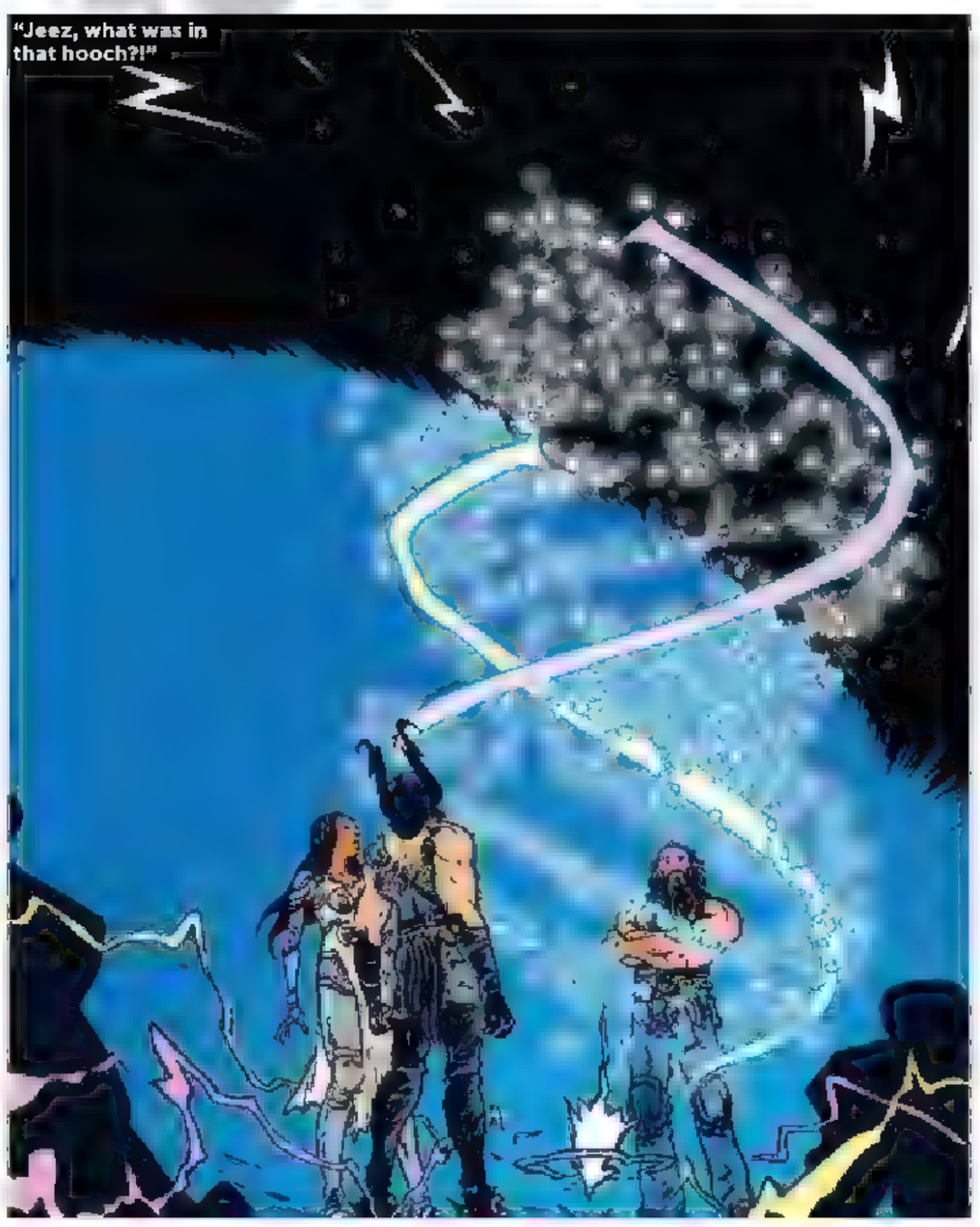
Set in the archetypal city of Arcopolis, *Battling Boy* has been described as "a new generation superhero" by *Entertainment Weekly* and has been purposely designed by the Brooklyn-based cartoonist as a four-colour gateway drug – or super-soldier serum if you like – into the gloriously vibrant world of comic books.

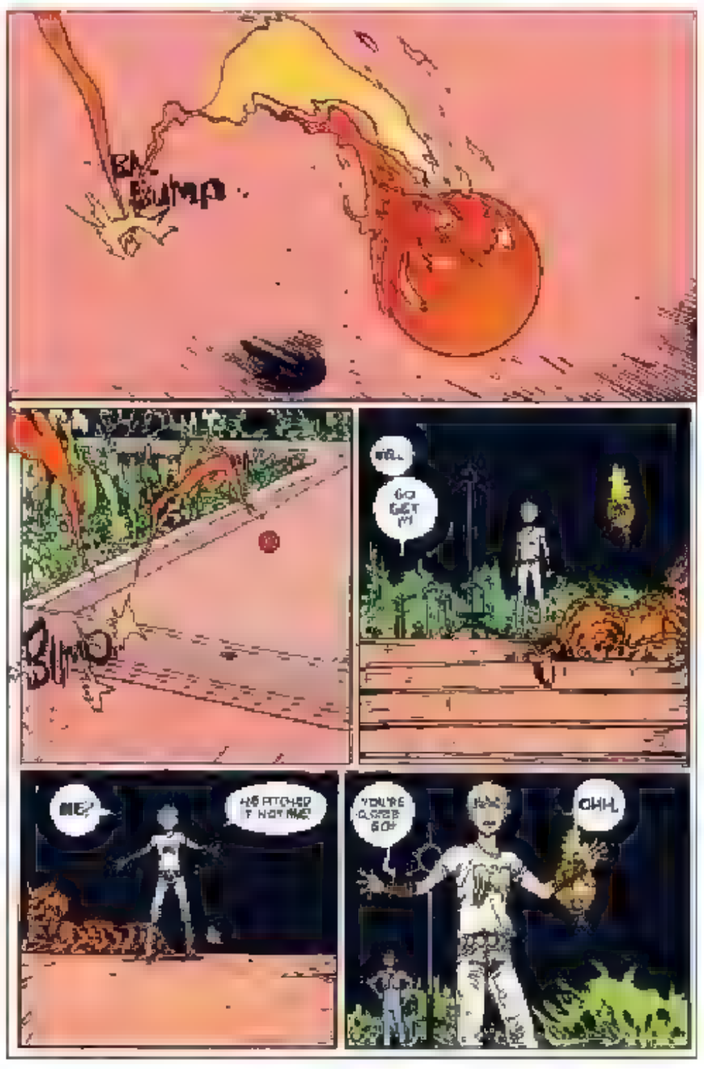
"As I was finishing my last books for DC, I realised that I'd been doing so many books set in New York, which were more or less realistically done," he recalls when *Comic Heroes* meets him at a bar just around the corner from his New York publisher First Second Books. "Especially as I'd been working on *Batman* and getting so engaged in the mythology of the hero and the story and superhero origins.

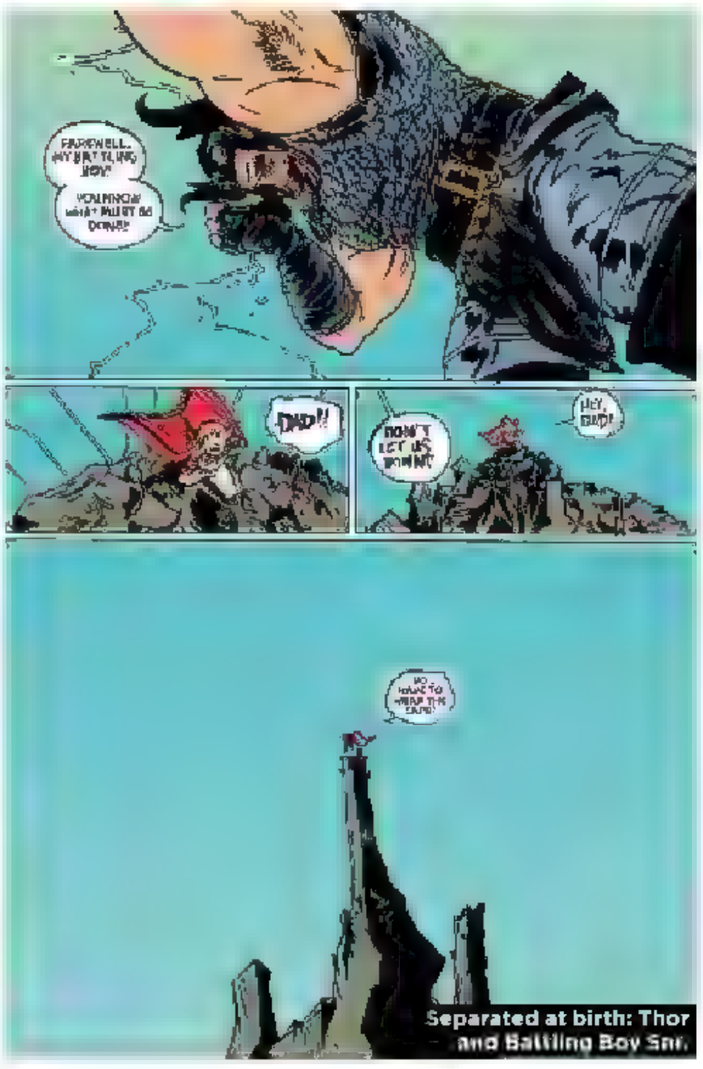
"Around the time I was finishing that, I started working with Michael Chabon on a big budget film adaptation of his novel *The Amazing Adventures Of Kavalier And Clay*, which was about two immigrant comic book writers in WW2 America. As I result, I spent most of 2006 basically waiting for decisions to get made. We ended up creating this kind of think-tank to decide things like where the story was going. What we were really doing was taking the hood off the car and trying to understand the mechanics of what makes a superhero story work. After that experience, when I met the people from First Second I was thinking of this germ of an idea for a superhero. I wanted to do a kid character because I've got teenage nephews, and it started from there."

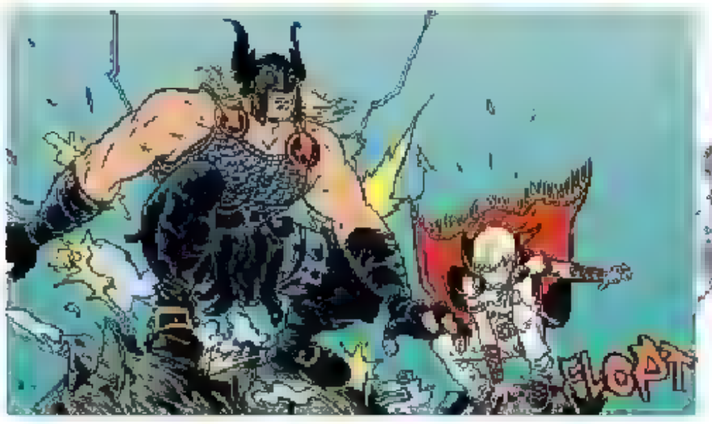
FOR READERS OF ALL AGES

Released late last year, *Battling Boy* is essentially aimed at a younger audience,






FAREWELL, MY BRETHLING, BOY!
YOU KNOW WHAT I'LL BET SO DOING!
DAD!!
DON'T LET US DOING
HEY, DAD!
NO HAVE TO WRAP THIS CAPE!
Separated at birth: Thor and Battling Boy Snr.



"I also wanted to do a kid superhero, who wasn't just another version of Batman or Iron Man"

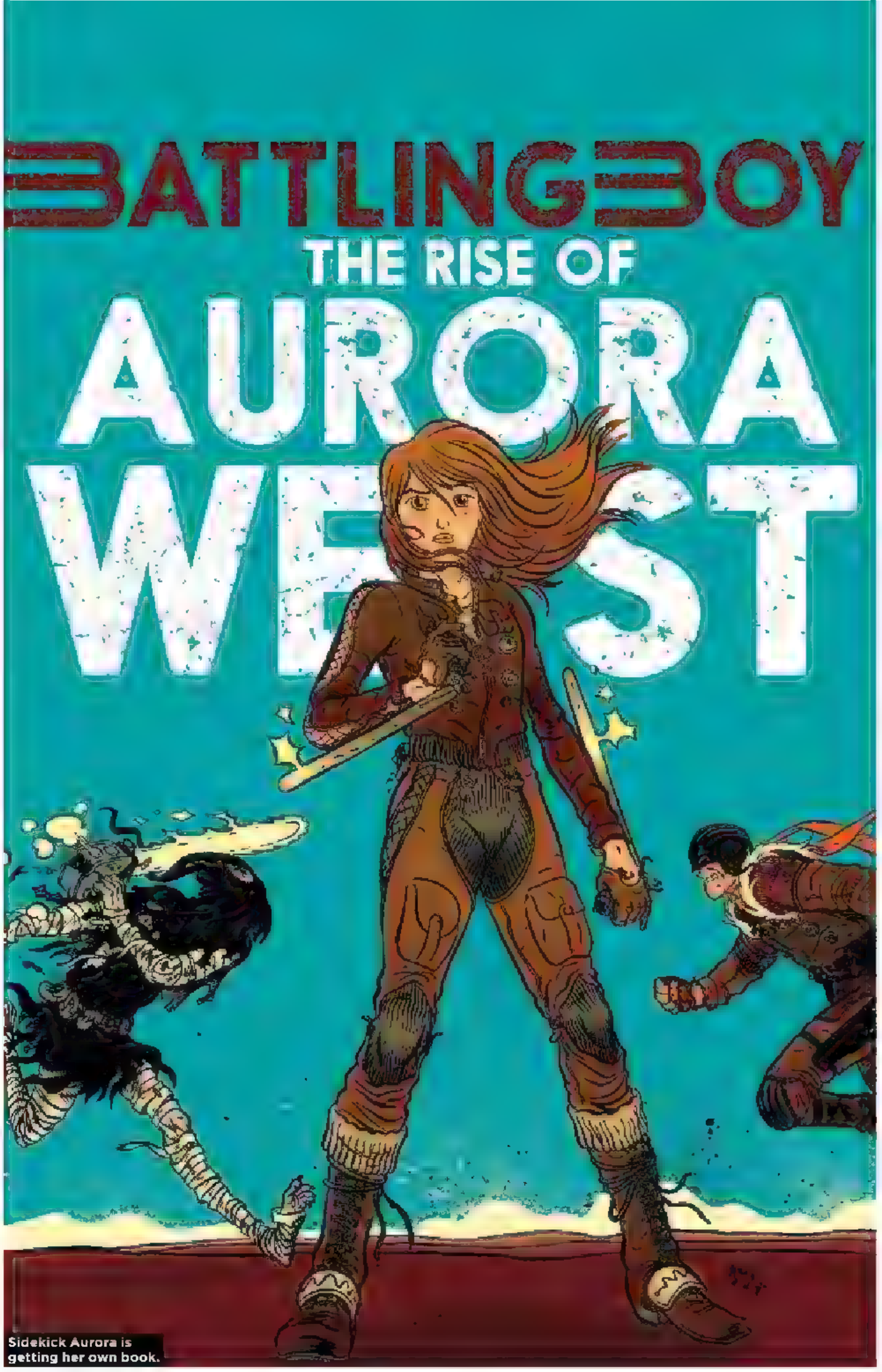
although with its wry tribute to the canonical oeuvre of comic book pioneers like Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko it also resonates with more seasoned readers.

"It just developed organically like that," explains Pope. "The initial idea was to do a superhero story where he fights monsters from classic fairytales. But I also wanted to do a kid superhero, who wasn't just another version of Batman or Iron Man because I'd identified that there aren't really any new or fresh comics that are done for a kid readership.

"I'd done teenage sidekicks before with Batman and Robin – as most of my superhero work has been Batman-related. I wanted to approach Robin as a serious character and get into the psychology of what it really means to be a sidekick. There are different codified versions of that kind of character – Captain America has Bucky, Batman has Robin, or at this stage several Robins, and even Iron Man has protégés. Thinking about it more deeply, the thing that makes the kid superheroes cool is that they are kind of heroes of potentiality as they really haven't achieved anything yet. I like that a lot and it appeals to children. I don't have any kids myself but we were all kids once and I can remember how that felt."

The tale begins with brash 12-year-old demigod Battling Boy falling spectacularly to Earth, where he is soon embroiled in the fight against child-snatching villain Sadisto. He then encounters budding teenage vigilante Aurora West, who has taken up her family mantle after her superhero father Haggard West is killed in action.

"In my mind, the superhero story is always the origin story and once that's established you can tell other stories within that spectrum," reasons Pope. "But I wanted to do something different and that's why Haggard West dies. It was important to identify this character as the classic American archetypal superhero – but who is then immediately killed. It's almost like you taking the needle violently off the record »



Sidekick Aurora is getting her own book.

The Return of THB

Pope has hatched a cunning plan to revive his long-running sci-fi epic *THB* – first published through his own Horse Press imprint in the mid-'90s – once he's finished with *Battling Boy*.

"It's funny because the audience that I've always had in mind for *THB*," he says, "is the kind of kid who would read *Dune*, *Starship Troopers* or *The Lord Of The Rings* for the first time. It's just that in comics and the way the American market is set up, that audience is not really catered for right now.

"I knew at some point that I had to stop *THB* as otherwise I would continue to self-publish forever, reach 5,000-8,000 people and make some kind of living by having this work that exists but doesn't meet its intended audience. Now I feel that the option is for *THB* to follow *Battling Boy*, for whom the readership would probably be aged 10 years and upwards. By the time *Battling Boy* is done, those readers will be teenagers and they will be ready for something a little bit more sophisticated in terms of themes and plotlines. There's also the question of sex, which you really wouldn't put into a book for 12-year-olds as they're still at that level of blushing and first crushes. For *THB*, some of the themes are more about politics, economics and interpersonal relationships, things that by the time *Battling Boy* is done, those who want to read more will be ready for."

in order to clear some space to make a new superhero, who would traditionally be a sidekick but now has no one left to lead them."

While Haggard West takes his name from *She* author H Rider Haggard, *Battling Boy*'s fantastical home realm is reminiscent of both Jack Kirby's *Fourth World* and Marvel's sci-fi makeover of Asgard.

> **"It was important to identify the character as the archetypal superhero – then kill him"**

"I didn't realise that there was so much of the *Fourth World* in there until the book was coming out," admits Pope. "When I was formulating the idea, I wanted a very pan-mythological story told using all the classic superhero tropes, so it would require Haggard West, a sidekick and a pantheon of gods. I wanted them to be very generic; Battling Boy's father is not Thor, he's a war god but his name is 'Dad'. I wanted to pull back as far as I could with those things. I'm also a fan of Fellini so there's some *Satyricon* in there and Mike Hodges's *Flash Gordon* is another influence."

GETTING HEAVY

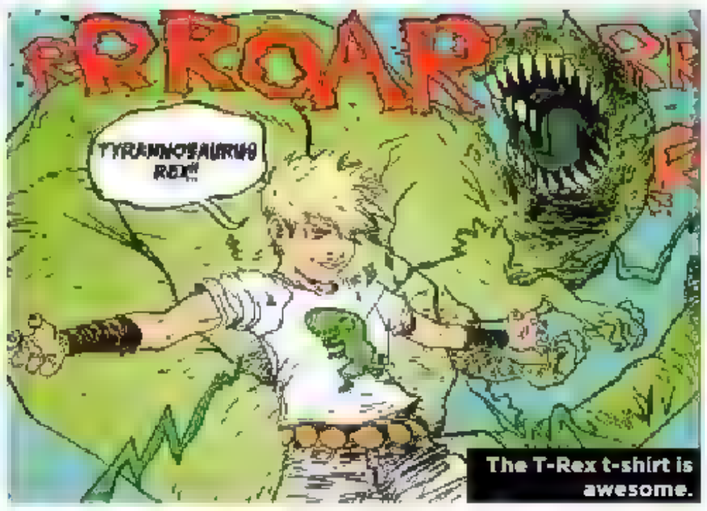
Apart from the far-out escapades of Silver Age titles like Jack Kirby's *New Gods* and famous pulp novels such as *John Carter Of Mars* and *Doc Savage*, Pope also delved into his collection of '70s *Heavy Metal* magazines.

"They had stories by Moebius and Richard Corben – some pretty over-the-top, ratcheted-up, strange, esoteric material," he says. "I was thinking about it, remembering that I could read this stuff as a kid. Just to isolate *Fantastic Four*, the Silver Age stories are really grim in a way, with Doctor Doom being this man encased in armour, whose pretty burned up because he blew himself up in a botched experiment. There were all these heavy ideas but they were done in such a way that when I first read those issues, at just six, seven or eight years old, they felt more like this huge operatic story as opposed to a personal tragedy about someone being disfigured. We hear about those kinds of atrocities all the time now in the news so we have to find a way to process them in a larger sense, where the atrocity is not the end of something but actually part of a bigger, more invisible narrative that we don't see. That's why people keep coming back to the hero story."

With their convoluted continuities, though, most mainstream titles are now frustratingly inaccessible to new readers, who aren't up to speed with the intricate details of the latest crossover event.

"I know myself that when *Batman: Year 100* came out, it was being pushed at an adult audience," says Pope. "I read adult comics – we

BROTHER.
YOU ARE THE BUILDER AND POET AMONG US.
WHEN I LOOK UPON THIS ALL I CAN SEE—
THIS IS...
...ALWAYS A STUNNING SIGHT.
...ARE BATTLEFIELDS
...AND WARS YET TO COME.
STILL...
I AM CERTAIN SOMEPLACE AMONG ALL THESE SCARRED AND BLEEDING LANDS...
...IS THE ONE WHICH SUITS OUR NEED.
HUH?
It's *Battling Boy* meets *Gravity*.



The T-Rex t-shirt is awesome.

all do because we're adults – but I knew from my nephews, from the time when they were adolescents or pre-adolescents, that they could read the old Silver Age comics and deal with the notion that Spider-Man's uncle is murdered and understand that that's what sets the story in motion. A lot of the stuff I was doing was too much for a kid to deal with, though, so I wanted to return to a more innocent – but still serious – approach to those kinds of stories."

SIDEKICK'S SIDEKICK

While Pope is hard at work on the next *Battling Boy* salvo, September will see the first of two spin-off graphic novels, focusing on his partner-in-crimefighting, Aurora West.

"Battling Boy needed a foil, someone to offset him, and I also felt like there needed to be more of a feminine presence in the books," says Pope. "What's interesting is that Aurora's story is more about vengeance while his is about discovery but he's also very aloof because he's a god among humans, so he's not that invested in the problem. He's interested in fulfilling whatever mission it takes to get back to where the gods come from. I thought they would make for an interesting team because they have that kind of light/darkness to them – a classic pairing like Han Solo and Luke Skywalker or Batman and Superman.

"Then if you look at it more deeply, his power is magical and from a sort of demigod source. He can rely on his invulnerability and he can literally call down a lightning bolt from the gods. Aurora can't do that: she's left with this arsenal of weapons and a mansion but no guidance. They're also like quasi-siblings, who are destined to be together, which I thought was an interesting challenge."

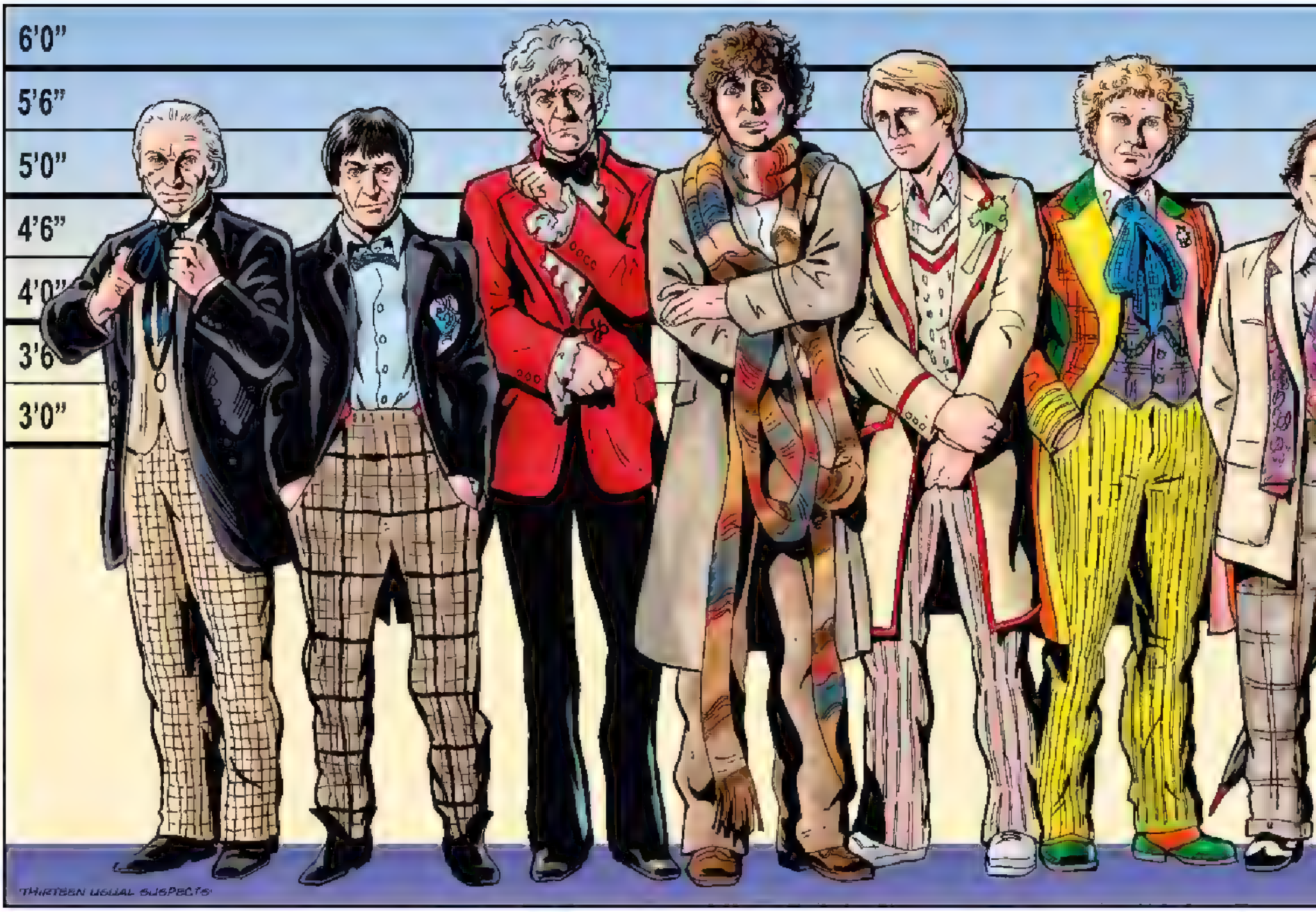
Co-written by filmmaker JT Petty and drawn by Spanish artist David Rubin, *The Rise Of Aurora West* represents the writer/artist's first major foray into artistic collaboration. "As part of the larger five-year *Battling Boy* campaign, there's a pretty big story and my editor Mark Siegel asked me if I wanted to do some more stories," says Pope. "I regretted killing Haggard so fast. There was a story we could tell and that was his story. We knew that Aurora was going to become a pretty important character in Battling Boy's story since she's not quite a sidekick but more of an ally, an equal hero, even though no one knew about her until the book came out. Mark asked me if I wanted to explore that in a second series, using her and her father because there is clearly a problem in Arcopolis before Battling Boy arrives."

THINKING BIG SCREEN

Battling Boy has been optioned for a film by Brad Pitt's production company Plan B, and Pope is optimistic that his teen hero will eventually hit the big screen. He's been collaborating closely with *Watchmen* screenwriter Alex Tse.

"I've been working on the adaptation as I've been working on the graphic novel and there's now a ninth draft of the script. I've also written a prose novella, which is the entire story, which we're using as the basis of the graphic novel which will also become the film if it ever happens. Right now, we've taken it off the table because it's just too time consuming for me to do both. It would be a big budget film if it happens in the way that we're thinking, so the studio needs the security of knowing that there is a built-in audience for it. That's really what we're doing now, building an audience for the book and then we can think about the film because it's ultimately an adaptation of the comic book rather than an original." CH

***Battling Boy** is out now through First Second and art catalogue **Monsters And Titans: Battling Boy On Tour** is available through Image Comics. **The Rise Of Aurora West** is published in September.*



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Lee Sullivan's top tips for creating a comic book likeness

WHAT ARE YOU LIKE?

From Sylvester McCoy to Captain Kirk, artist Lee Sullivan has a history of profiling familiar personalities, as **Calum Waddell** discovers

Lee Sullivan has been part of the British comic scene since the late '80s, when his colourful work on *Doctor Who* and *Transformers* made him an obvious name to watch. He followed these impressive achievements with a run on such familiar franchises as *RoboCop*, *Judge Dredd* and the William Shatner-created *TekWorld*, so Sullivan knows a thing or two about how to create a likeness of well-loved TV and film personalities. We quizzed him for some expert advice on creating a caricature that honours the original source, whilst also maintaining a style that is unique to the artist's hand.

START WITH A PHOTOGRAPHIC REFERENCE

"Usually, if someone says, 'We want you to work on this property – and it's based on a television show or a movie franchise,' you will begin by going to a photographic reference and sketching the main actor, or actors, from that. Artists today don't know how easy they have it because back when I was starting out you had to rely on VHS tapes. So you had a freeze frame of a blurry image, from an already blurry image, to work with. Now of course you can work from a photographic reference on a DVD or on the internet. You have a library of high resolution pictures at your fingertips. So, yes, if you're asked to do a likeness of somebody, a good, clear photograph is as good a place to start as any..."

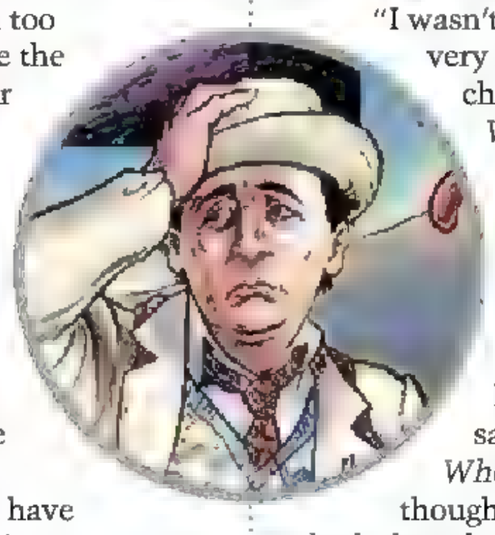
WATCH THE PERSON IN MOTION

"You also have to watch the person in motion to get an idea of how to draw them properly. When I got the job working on *Doctor Who*, I got all of the tapes that were available and I spent a long time looking at Sylvester McCoy, in particular, because he was tricky to get down – he has a very unique and individual screen persona. It is very hard to create a 3D model in your head of what a real person looks like – but, eventually, you want to be able to draw somebody from just your

imagination – so looking at film footage is a great help. It allows the actor to really get into your brain."

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU ARE REFERENCING

"Now this is the thing about using photographs… Sometimes, and I'm not mentioning names here, you can tell when someone is relying on them too much. Basically, you can see the original photographs in their drawings. Fans of *Doctor Who*, for instance, are not stupid – they know that universe very well and they will spot something that's taken straight from a picture. So, sure, get your ideas from images, or the show itself, but if you're asked to do something like *Doctor Who* make sure you have a clear idea of how to make it your own.



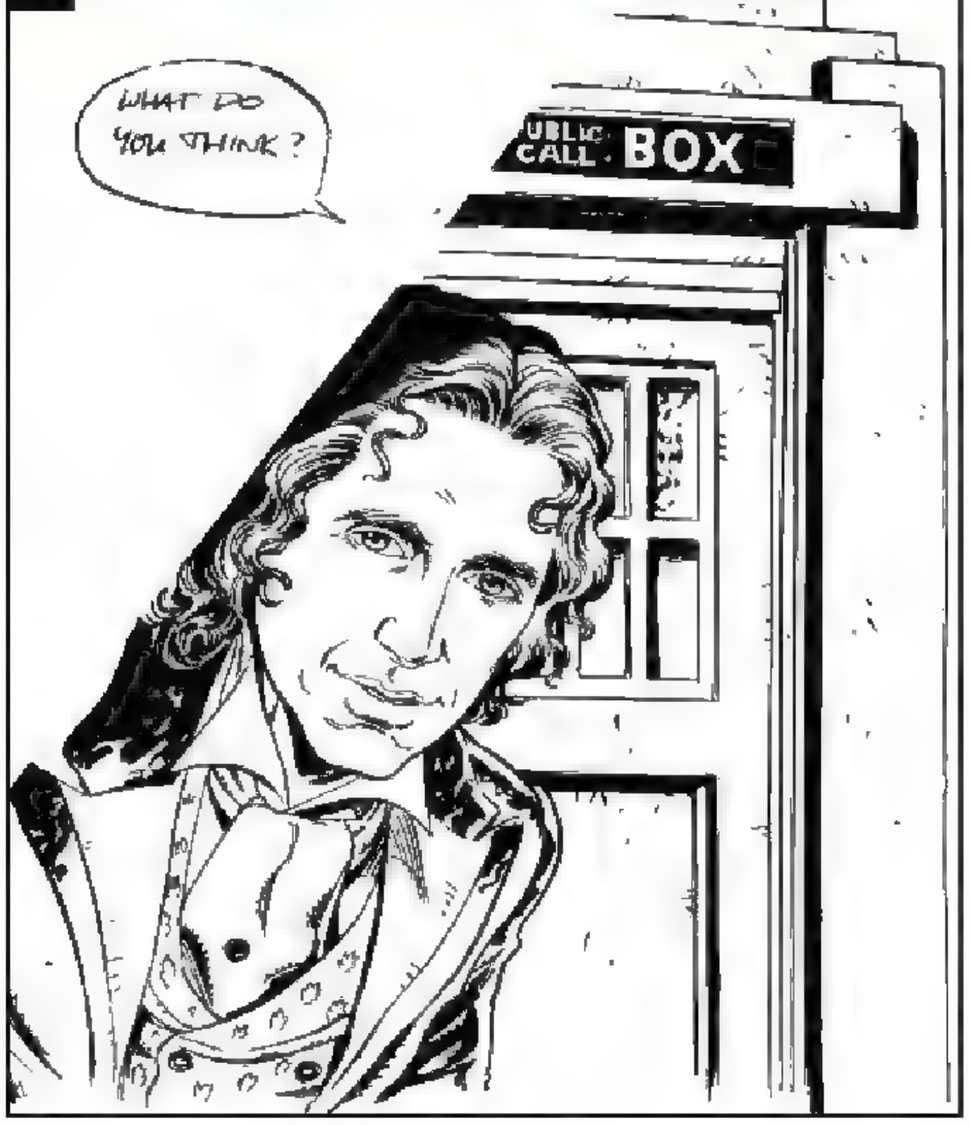
"Sometimes you might not like how it comes out but at least it's your work and your own take on something. I think the caricature that was least successful was my version of Sylvester McCoy. At the time I thought I was doing him quite well but in the end I don't think I ever quite nailed it.

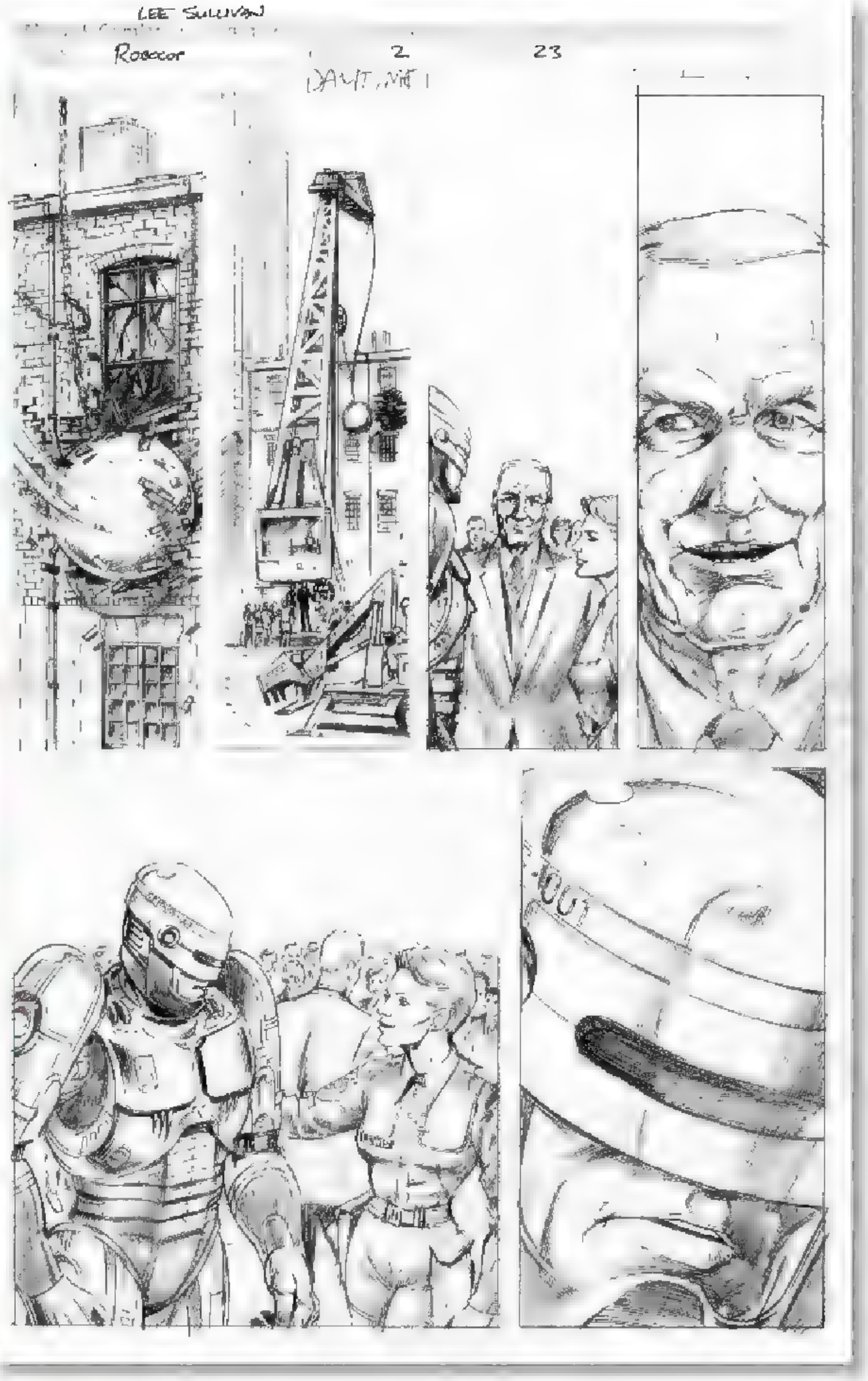
On the other hand, I did Paul McGann for the *Radio Times*, which ran as a year-long series, and that was good fun. I liked my version of Paul McGann **01** and I think I cracked that – it looked like him but in a way that remained 'mine'… And that, fittingly, brings me to my next point…"

DO YOUR OWN THING

"I wasn't actually in comics for very long before I got the chance to work on *Doctor Who Magazine* – and the reason it was so quick is that Richard Starkings saw me do something in *Transformers* that he liked. And what was it? A caricature of Richard Branson! He also showed samples of my *Doctor Who* stuff to a US editor who thought my art had a 'quirkier' look than the work he was seeing from Americans at the time – and that was apparently a good thing, as he gave me *RoboCop* to draw! I was praised for putting a double chin on Sylvester McCoy when I drew him for *Doctor Who*. So I think that it's important to keep your own style, even when you're drawing a real person.

01





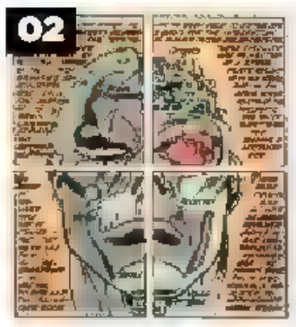
"Every artist has their own style – even if they can't see it. Personally, I can't see my own style. Other people say they can but I'm never convinced. It's probably something that just comes naturally so, even if you're not sure it's the right approach, make sure you stay true to yourself and do your own thing."

Above: Sullivan's two year run on *RoboCop* saw him working first w th Alan Grant and then reuniting with Simon *Transformers"* Furman **Right:** The inks were never finished on these *RoboCop* pages because the pane s were redrawn

DOING YOUR OWN THING MIGHT ALSO MEAN HAVING TO COMPROMISE

"One of the problems we had with *RoboCop* was the amount of interference we got from Orion Pictures – who owned the property – which took the title in a direction neither the editor nor myself or writer Alan Grant wanted the character or series to go in. Orion wanted to target a much younger audience and have more futuristic elements and far less violence. Also, *Deathlok* **02** was being produced by Marvel at the same time, and that character being part-man, part-machine was essentially a similar character to RoboCop.

"It's really difficult when the two universes are quite similar. The first *RoboCop* film is about the Murphy character being stronger and deadlier than the people he's up against. That's the fun of it – and we attempted to go from there. But we also had to keep in mind that we couldn't do any of the things that might put RoboCop into situations Orion wouldn't like; it was about compromise."



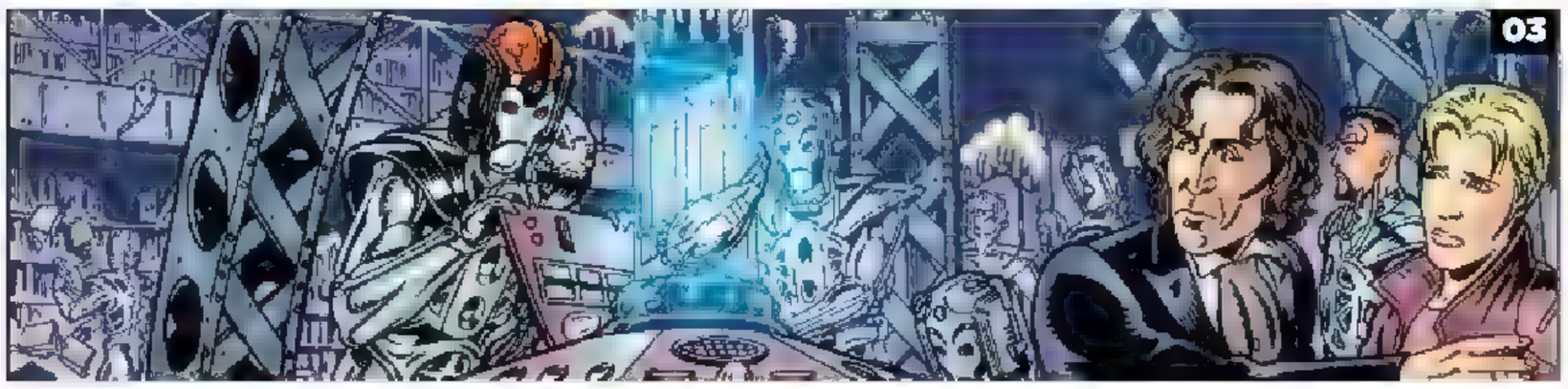
BE CAREFUL WHAT ERA YOU ARE DRAWING FROM

"Now this one is very important. If you are asked to draw somebody from a television series that has more than one season make sure you don't confuse the mythology. The actors usually change their look between seasons – hairstyle, clothes, that sort of thing. I've seen other artists draw an actor from *Doctor Who* and I've thought to myself, 'You're referencing images that are from different seasons.' So be very careful about that."

DON'T JUST DRAW THE PERSON – DRAW THE LANDSCAPE AS WELL

"If you cannot draw a character in three dimensional landscapes then all you are left with is a series of talking heads. People who are reading comics may not be experts in the way things actually look but they can always tell when something is a bit off – so make sure you can place that great caricature in an environment that allows them to blend in properly. **03**

"My advice is to start with a funfair. Eventually ever comic book writer will give you a story set in an amusement park. I've never worked on a long-running series that hasn't. For some reason, everyone agrees that you need to put a character in an amusement park at some point!"



TRY NOT TO COPY YOURSELF

"I submitted a drawing to Boom! Studios for their new *RoboCop* series and

KNOWING WHAT HE NOW KNOWS, HE MUST SEEK ME OUT. IF ONLY TO SEE HIS FUTURE IN MY FACE.
BUT IF HE TURNS AWAY FROM HIS DESTINY, THEN TRULY HE IS NOT WORTHY OF THE NAME.
ALTERED EGO
Marcos Riveria
GALVATRON!
TELL ME THIS IS SOME SICK JOKE! TELL ME IT IS LIES – ALL LIES!
MARVEL
THE TRANSFORMERS
I'M BACK
AND I'M MAD!
05

everything I do now is digital. By and large I've stopped doing work manually. I was working in a different medium, from scratch and without referencing my previous work, I drew RoboCop pointing his gun at the reader as a potential first cover. And it wasn't until I'd finished it that I realised I'd drawn almost exactly the same front cover as the one that was on issue one of the old Marvel comic book of *RoboCop*! It was, in some ways, better but in other ways not quite as bold. I had done, instinctively, the same pose and the dynamic was more or less the same too. So that is one of the things that can happen when you stop referencing images or footage and begin to draw from an image in your head – you can find yourself doing the same thing all over again."

TRY AND IMAGINE AN ACTUAL ACTOR UNDER THE ROBOT SUIT OR SUPERHERO COSTUME

"Sometimes, of course, you will be expected to draw a character that is already established but not based on a real person. Optimus Prime from *Transformers* is an excellent example of this – it really hits the nail on the head. The Transformers don't have faces – but in the case of Optimus Prime, he does have eyes. So I began to work from that and one of the ways I put my own stamp on the character was to imagine him as an actor.

"For Optimus Prime, I decided it was Adam West underneath all of the robotics – and that was what I was thinking every time I drew him **04**. Optimus Prime is quite po-faced, and Adam West is my favourite Batman, so I felt that it just worked – maybe it's hard to explain! I imagined Galvatron was Jack Nicholson **05**. I mean, he seemed so obviously like Jack Nicholson because he was nuts and he had that manic look. So I drew him that way – and I found that really helped.

"If you're generating a character, and you can imagine the actor that might be playing them, then there's a good gateway there to defining them for yourself. The readers may not pick up on what you are doing but if it's in your head then that's all that matters."

04

Above: There's a definite "Here's Johnny" insp red glint in Ga vatron's evil yellow eyes.

"RoboCop is an interesting example of this because I was not allowed to do an exact likeness of the actor who played him. We were told, from issue one onwards, that we couldn't use Peter Weller. The licence from Orion was for the character but the actor's likeness was to be avoided, as they would probably have had to pay the actor extra and obviously they didn't want to do that. Of course, because RoboCop wears a mask **06** I had some degree of flexibility, but I still had to deliberately not do that little cupid bow mouth that Weller has. The good thing about that is it meant that I didn't really have to worry about likenesses too much – however, all too often I'd still find myself thinking, 'Damn, this looks a little too much like Weller.' So that brings me back to a previous point – you really need to put your own influence in there. In the case of *RoboCop* it was essential – otherwise I'd never have been able to work on that comic."

KNOW YOUR LINEAGE

"When the first *RoboCop* film came out I was very impressed by it. I thought it was a very good steal from *Judge Dredd*. All through the film I was sitting there and thinking, 'Yeah this is so *Judge Dredd*.' I had no doubt that they'd seen that movie. It's a film with a colossal amount of violence, although it's clearly anti-violence.

"When I got the job on *RoboCop* I was really pleased. I thought, 'What a great thing to turn into a comic book,' although it didn't go the way that I'd hoped. I think the big problem was that we moved away from the film and from the Judge Dredd-style character that he was. We set him in a universe that was too far removed from his lineage. We had him chasing criminals who rode around on flying bikes – a little like in *Back To The Future* – and that's the wrong universe for the character.

"So I think when you adapt something from a film you really need to be quite strict about the universe as well. Getting

FOR A SCORN TO BE REDUNDANT MODEL!
FLAK!
AH NO NOT QUITE NOT ANYMORE, THANKS TO THE OLD MAN, FRAIL FLESH IS NOW COLD STEEL AND STRENGTH! I AM ROBOCOP, THE ULTIMATE PRODUCT OF THE PROGRAM!
I AM THE TRUE FUTURE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT
NO!

the likeness of the character down is not enough: you need to get the likeness of the universe right as well. If you wouldn't believe something happening in the film world of a character then perhaps you should think twice about bringing it into the comic book world.

"So, for instance, with RoboCop one of the things I really didn't want to do was give him a bigger version of himself to fight – they did that with the movie *RoboCop 2* and that's not really the point. It's obvious, and understandable, but a lazy thing to do."

Above: Towards the end of his *RoboCop* run, new editor Rob Tokar let Sullivan provide inks as well as pencils
Right: Sullivan enjoyed his *TekWorld* experience. "It's very rare that you get to design a future world from scratch whilst being overseen by a childhood hero and icon."

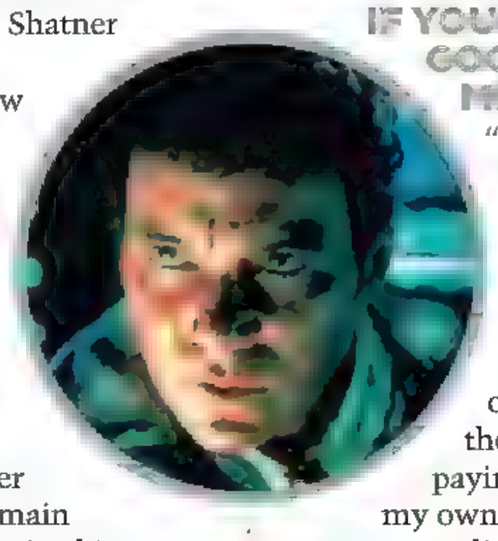
THEY'RE GIVING ME BACK MY LAZGUN, TOO?
YOUR PAROLE ALLOWS YOU TO CARRY WEAPONS
STILL PRETTY UNSTEADY, EH, CARDIGAN?
DON'T WORRY- I'M OKAY.
THEN GET MOVING. WILL YOU? WE'RE LATE
SHUTTLE DOCK
REVIVAL AREA
IF YOU CAN'T WALK-- PERHAPS DR GOODHILL WILL LOAN YOU HIS WHEEL-CHAIR.
DAMN YOU, WINGER!

Left: Sullivan's Harry Callahan inspired Jake Cardigan in William Shatner's *Tekworld*

YOU SHOULDN'T NECESSARILY DRAW SOMEBODY THE WAY THEY LOOK NOW. THEY MIGHT NOT APPRECIATE IT

"When I did *TekWorld* back in the '90s it was obvious that William Shatner had created it with him in mind as the lead – but I knew I couldn't do a straight rendering of Shatner because that would be hokey. I wasn't the first choice for *TekWorld*, but the original artist had drawn a chubby Captain Kirk which I didn't think worked.

"I thought, 'Well if Shatner is imagining himself as the main guy he's probably thinking he's a bit more like Clint Eastwood' – so I gave his face harder lines and made him a little bit *Dirty Harry*. Then we had to change him all over again because the actor Greg Evigan came along to play the part in the TV series. Even that was interesting because it was a case of still making him Shatner-esque. I think, though, if I'd proposed the character as Shatner in the 'here and now' I'd never have been given that job."



IF YOUR LIKENESS IS GOOD, SOMEONE MIGHT NICK IT

"At about the same time as I was doing the *RoboCop* comics they were also doing a *RoboCop* cartoon in the US. When it was released on VHS in the UK I discovered they'd used one of my drawings from the comic books without paying me. I even had to buy my own copy of the video! It was very peculiar because I hadn't even watched the series, yet my own art was being used to sell it. I guess someone responded to what I was doing."

You can learn more about Lee Sullivan at www.leesullivanart.co.uk

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MUTANT MASTERMIND

Chris Claremont, the writer who reimagined the X-Men, talks to **Joseph McCabe** about tragic heroes, strong women and his favourite X-Movie

The New Mutants channel Bohemian Rhapsody.
DON'T CALL 'EM X-BABIES ANYMORE!
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STARTS WITH ISSUE #18. SEE EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW IN MARVEL AGE #16.

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HOPE
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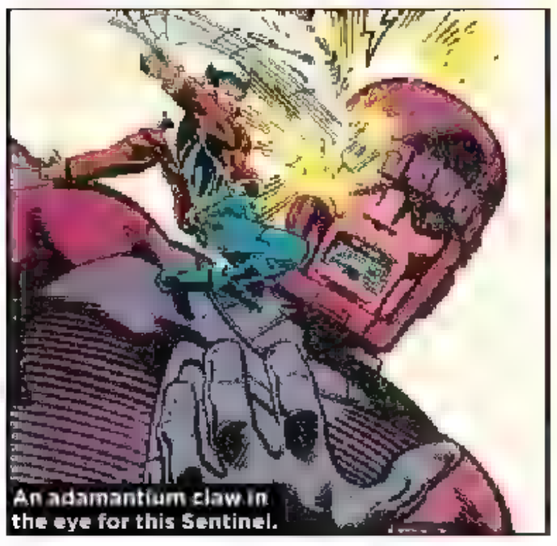
I GOTCHA A LEGEND RIGHT HERE!
BY CHRIS CLAREMONT, ALAN DAVIS & PAUL NEARY
BEGINNING IN JUNE, FROM MARVEL!



All images © Marvel

Few post-Silver Age comic creators are so closely identified with a team of superheroes as Chris Claremont, but then few creators have created so rich a universe as Claremont has within the graphic storytelling medium.

Starting with *Uncanny X-Men* #94, the writer brought an unprecedented level of characterisation to mainstream comic books, developing the "new" X-Men team introduced by Len Wein in *Giant-Sized X-Men* #1 and introducing a host of other characters throughout his succeeding 15 years – yes, *15 years* – on the book. Yet unlike many of his American peers, Claremont's chief influence wasn't found in the Marvel and DC comics of the '60s, but rather in his native homeland, the UK.

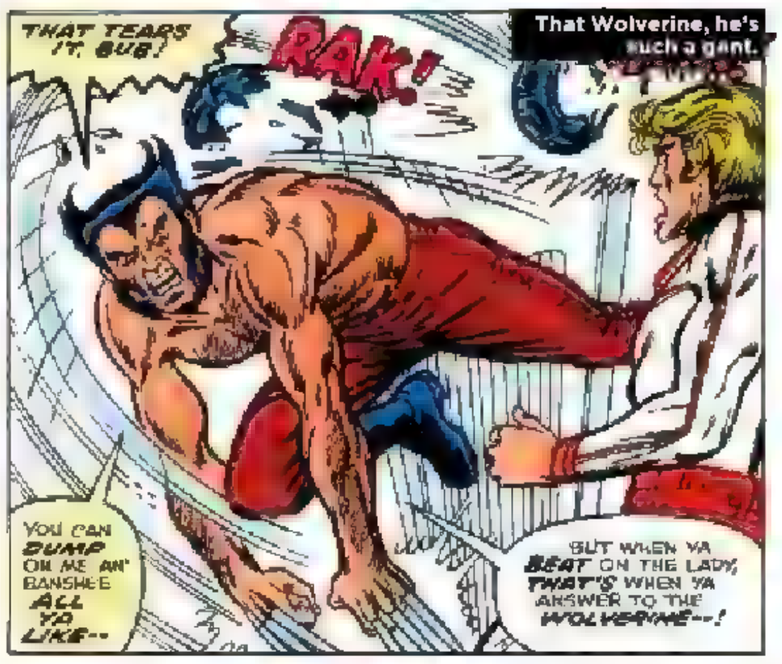
"I actually grew up as a fan and a reader of an English graphic weekly called *Eagle*," says Claremont, who spent his first three years in London before his family emigrated to New York City. "My grandmother sent me them every week as a way of staying in touch. *Eagle* was a comic newspaper that had been founded by a minister of all things, who was a writer. His signature character was Dan Dare, Sky Pilot of the Space Waves, or Colonel Dan Dare of Space Command as he was properly known. It had some of the most brilliant and creative visual art of its day. Two pages, a front and back cover, of full photogravure colour and really cool stories. And some of the best alien villains of the time. It was great.

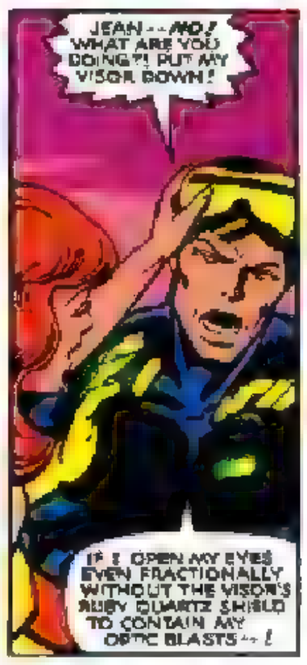
"They had stories about heroic British soldiers during World War II. They had stories about student athletes. They had the life of Winston Churchill, the life of Jesus. And a brilliant Ralph Bellamy series called *Heroes Of Sparta*, about a young Spartan who was adopted into a Roman family and became a hero of the empire. It was extremely eclectic and just plain beautiful. I loved it. That was my introduction to the concept of graphic storytelling and what you could do with comics in print.

"Marvel was something I came to when I was in high school," Claremont continues. "I got hooked by Stan and Jack's introduction of Galactus in *Fantastic Four* #48-50, which I think I still have. That was Jack at his best, Stan at his best, the series at its best. That drew me in, so I began to look for more like it, and found *Thor*. That led me to Roy and John Buscema's work on *The Avengers*."

X-WOMEN

Like the Avengers, Claremont's X-Men would offer a motley collection of champions embroiled in adventures both intimate in their emotional pull and cosmic in scope. But unlike most team books, its roster of women members grew steadily, »


THAT TEARS IT, BUB!
RAK!
That Wolverine, he's such a gent.
YOU CAN DUMP ON ME AN' BANSHEE ALL YA LIKE--
BUT WHEN YA BEAT ON THE LADY, THAT'S WHEN YA ANSWER TO THE WOLVERINE--!


JEAN--NO! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?! PUT MY VISOR DOWN!
IF I OPEN MY EYES EVEN FRACTIONALLY WITHOUT THE VISOR'S RUBY QUARTZ SHIELD TO CONTAIN MY OPTIC BLASTS--!

SUDDENLY
YOURS WAS AN ADMIRABLE RUSE, STORM. BUT ESCAPING ME WON'T BE THAT EASY.
WHY ARE YOU ATTACKING US?
FOR PITY'S SAKE, JEAN--WHY?!
ASK NOT FOR PITY FROM DARK PHOENIX, MY LOVE. THERE'S NONE IN HER.
SHE STRIKES LIKE THE ANGEL OF DEATH--TERRIBLE IN HER UNHUMAN BEAUTY--AS ELEMENTAL, AS MAJESTIC, AS THE STARS IN THE HEAVENS
For pity's sake, indeed Jean Grey.

eventually boasting some of the most iconic female characters in comics. In addition to developing personalities for Jean Grey and Storm, Claremont created Phoenix, Emma Frost, Mystique, Rogue, Kitty Pryde, Psylocke and Jubilee.

"I guess part of it is the women I know in my life," says Claremont. "My mother was in the RAF during the war. She was part of the crew of a radar station on the south coast during the Battle of Britain, which was, to put it mildly, a prime target. So every morning the locals from across the water would come over to visit, leave souvenirs, and then every afternoon they'd patch everything up and turn the radar back on and let command know how to properly greet the guests.

"I have close female friends who have spent their time in the heart of Africa researching disease or helping report the news from some of the most dangerous places in the world. When you know people like that, as a writer you can't help swiping the best aspects of who they are and how they do things and apply them to characters. That said, I actually like to think I don't treat the women as heroic icons any more or less honestly, honorably or truthfully than I do the men. My basic instinct when I took over the book was, 'Why is it a boys' club? Why shouldn't there be an equal number of women who are attractive as characters and as physical entities and, from a purely mercenary standpoint, open the potential to a whole broader sweep of audience?'"

SECOND COMING

Though Claremont's best known for his comics – writing not only *X-Men* but creating spin-off titles *New Mutants*, *Excalibur*, *Extreme X-Men* and *Wolverine* – his first professional sales were short stories. "And, surprise!" he laughs, "I discovered that I was really, really good at writing comics, and I was really popular at it, and suddenly I was doing a lot of it. Sometimes steady paychecks can trump ambition… Then once *X-Men* took flight, once we got over the initial hump and the book really began reaching out to the audience, there was no looking back."

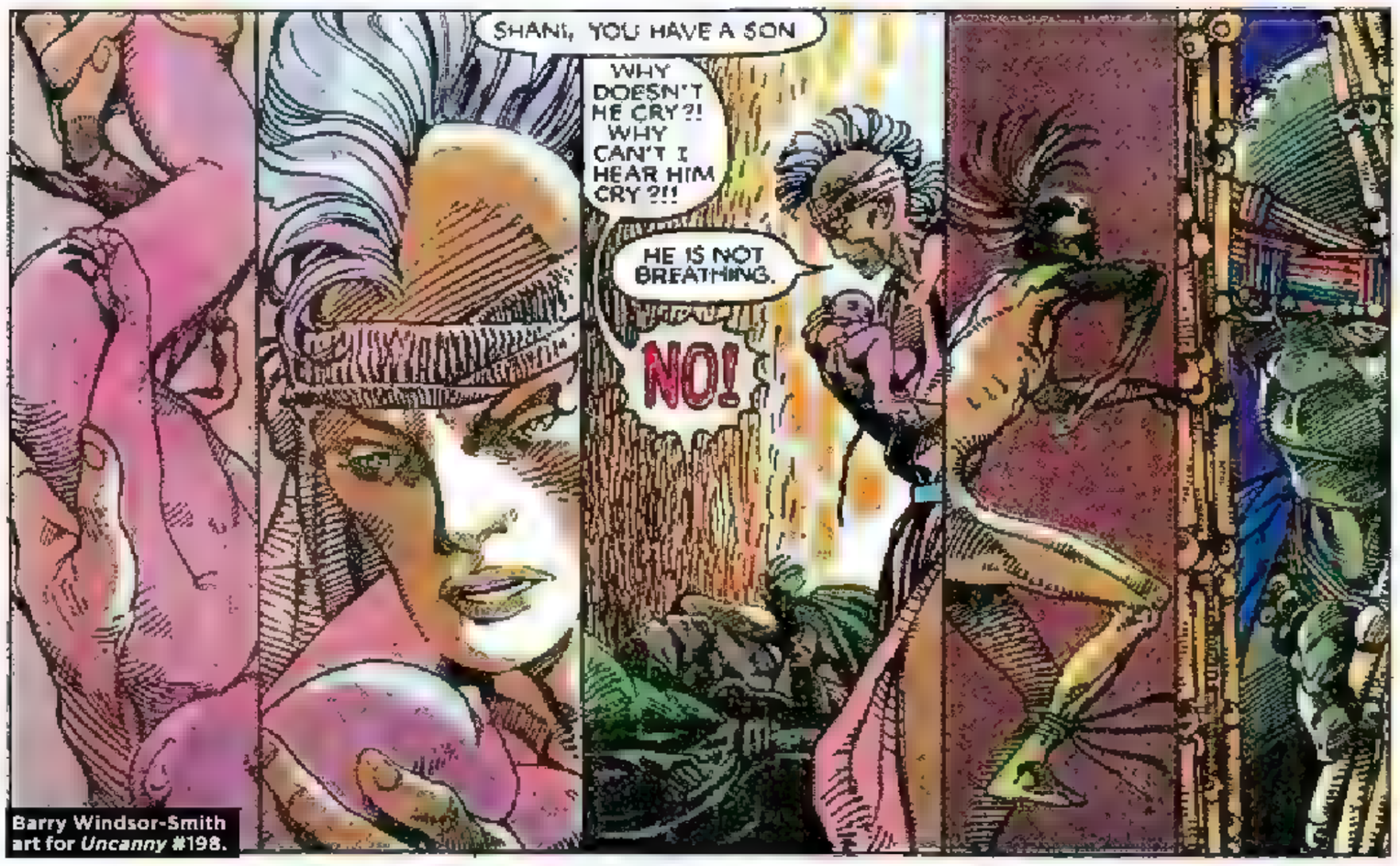
After proving his ability on titles such as *Daredevil* and *Iron Fist*, Claremont began his *X-Men* run paired with the late Dave Cockrum, the artist who'd co-created the team introduced in *Giant-Size* #1.

"One of the things that *X-Men* had going for it that made it unique at the time was that it was the relaunch of a failed series, but it was a relaunch that involved a substantial rethink of the concept. The idea being that it was going from the traditional all-American agglomeration of characters – four guys and a gal – all of whom were white, all of whom were middle class, most of whom were from the north east, coming together and forming a team of heroes. Cool. They were great characters, but it was limited by the time and the society. With the new X-Men, you suddenly had Scott from the Midwest, you had Ororo, who's from Kenya, you had Kurt, who's a German, you had Peter Rasputin, who's Russian, you had John Proudstar, who's a Native American, you have Logan, who's Canadian, as well as Banshee, who's Irish, and Sunfire, who's Japanese (he was there for the first two issues and then moved on). You had seven characters from different places and different cultures and different socio-economic realities."

Claremont took each mutant apart with one eye on truth and the other on what would most appeal to readers. No better example can be found than in *X-Men*'s most popular character, Wolverine.

"Len's original conception of Wolverine, that he had started with in *The Hulk* and carried over to *X-Men*, was that of a late teen, and that the claws were part of the uniform, not part of him. Yet when I looked at the pages that they gave me for the *Giant-Size*, when I was proofreading Len's script and the inks (because Len was editor-in-chief of Marvel and I was associate editor, which meant I was number two), I thought, 'Okay, we've got a guy who's an officer in the Canadian Armed Forces. That's means he's got to be a grown-up.' As Dave Cockrum and I kicked around the who, what and

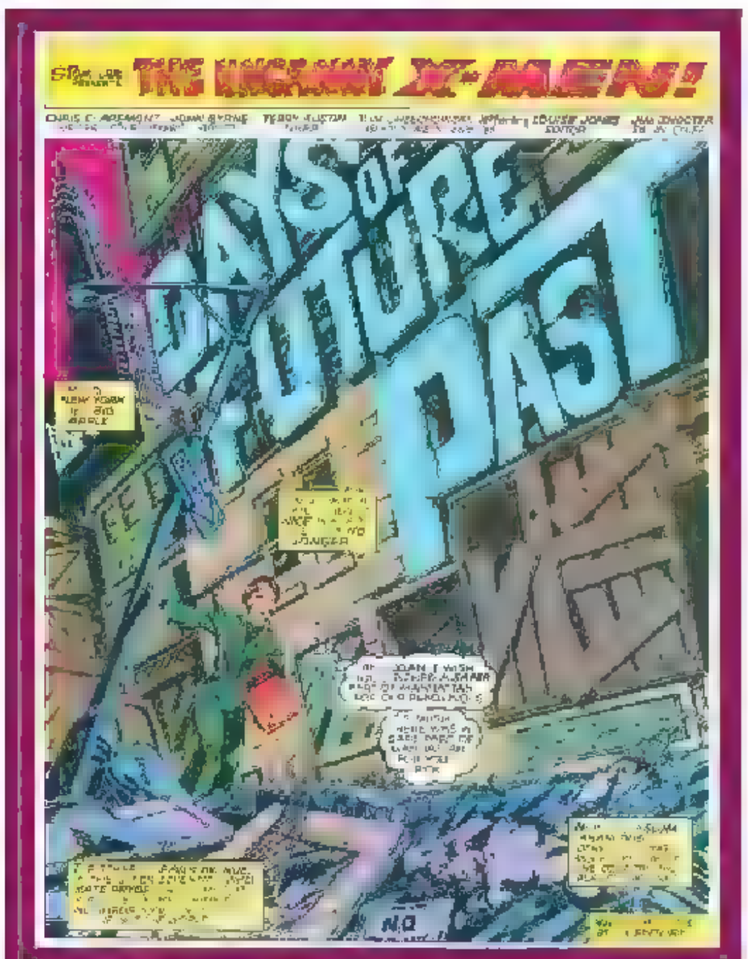
"My basic instinct was, 'Why is it a boys' club? Why shouldn't there be an equal number of women?'"



Barry Windsor-Smith art for *Uncanny* #198.

Something wicked this way comes!

Teenage X-Men spin-off *New Mutants*.



HERE COMES TOMORROW

No X-Men comic story showcases the fear and uncertainty with which the ever oppressed mutants must live as bleakly as "Days Of Future Past". The basis for this summer's fourth X-Men movie, it portrays a future in which mutants have been hunted to the brink of extinction. But according to creator Chris Claremont, no matter how the film ends up, it can't avoid the central question at the heart of his original tale.

"The end of the story is the key, which is when Ororo asks (or at least does in subsequent issues), 'Did we fix anything? Did we save the world or not?' The answer is 'We won't know until we get there,' and by then, let's face it, we'll either have won or it will be too late. What is seen far too often in *The Terminator* films is that nothing is wilier than the future that's determined to come out its way. No matter what is done in the past, the Terminators find a way to adapt to it in the future. Whatever the X-Men do in the past and in their present, who knows what effect it will have in our present?"

why of Wolverine, Dave came up with the idea of, 'What if the claws weren't from the costume? Because if you took off the costume he's got no weapon left. That's pretty stupid. What makes him scary? He's a kid with an attitude? Big deal.'

"Then Dave came up with the visual that the claws actually came out of his body. They punched out of his hand. Each time he used them he sliced his hand open, and his healing factor put him back together again. Then you have that wonderful moment – I say wonderful, but when you think about it it's really horrific – in *X-Men* #99 when he cuts himself loose on the spacestation, and Banshee and Jean look at him and say, 'The claws – they come out of your hand. They're part of you. You never told us.' Logan looks back at them and says, 'You never asked.'

"To Dave and I, that defined him and set him apart from everyone else. Because it added an element of horror and tragedy to him, because 'Holy cow! He's got a mutant power that required him to mutilate himself every time he uses it.' As Anna Paquin's Rogue says to Wolverine in the first *X-Men* movie, 'Does it hurt?' And he looks back at her and says, 'Every time.' That's the moment that that inspiration created, and that became the defining element of his character."

Among such classic stories as the original *Wolverine* miniseries (pencilled by Frank Miller), the epochal *Dark Phoenix Saga* (drawn by John Byrne), and the two-issue time-travel saga "Days Of Future Past"(Byrne again), perhaps Claremont's mutant masterpiece is the graphic novel *God Loves, Man Kills* (illustrated by *Astro City*'s Brent Anderson). The book served as the basis for the film *X2: X-Men United*, Claremont's favourite of the mutant movies thus far.

"I thought *X2* was a wonderful film. I selfishly would have preferred the opportunity to see *God Loves* in and of itself. I'd have preferred to see the Dark Phoenix story told more completely and richly than it regrettably turned out to be. With the end of *X3* what you have is a great set of revision notes. It was good, but it could and *should* have been a whole lot better.

"But that's the movies," he adds. "Darren Aronofsky and Chris McQuarrie's draft of the screenplay of *The Wolverine* was far, far more faithful to the original miniseries than the film turned out to be. But unfortunately he left the project fairly early, and the director that Fox found to replace him had different instincts and different interests. So the finished product, while it contained a number of foundation elements from Frank's and my story – and the Paul Smith sequel in *Uncanny*, plus some aspects of Larry Hama's work among others – was a divergent vision of the story. But it's not my $150m."

CURSE OF THE MUTANTS

As for Claremont's opinion of Marvel's mutant comics in the years since he left them, the writer remarks, "I guess I look at it from within my time bubble as the way they were, and the way I, as a creator, think they simply should be; whereas editors, writers today view them as 'This is the way I'm writing the character. Take it or leave it.' Because unfortunately, much as I tried to do when I came back a couple of times on *X-Men*, you cannot turn back time. You cannot undo what has been done. Which is a shame. Because part of me would love to redo the whole thing and start over."

"But that," he says, "is why I'm not anywhere near responsible for writing or editing any of this stuff. I'm just too darn radical."

THE WEB MASTER

Just in time for the big screen Spidey sequel, Dan Slott is resurrecting Peter Parker in the comic book universe. He tells **Stephen Jewell** what's in store

"Did you really think that we were never going to bring him back?" says the man who is very definitely bringing "him" back.

Settling down with Dan Slott at his table after a busy day signing books and shaking hands at London Super Comic Con, *Comic Heroes*'s conversation with the Spidey scribe is interrupted by an enthusiastic fan, thanking him for "bringing Peter back". But it's a testament to the enthralling roller-coaster ride that the New York-based author has taken readers on in the pages of *Superior Spider-Man* over the past 15 months that some fans will actually miss seeing Doc Ock in the wall-crawler's trademark red and blue long-johns when Peter Parker makes his inevitable return from the dead in the brand new *Amazing Spider-Man* #1 later this month.

"I've already got some messages on Twitter where people are going, 'Don't you dare kill Otto Octavius!' and, 'Don't bring back Peter!'" he laughs. "But that's the beauty of it as there really is no winning. But when we first started *Superior Spider-Man* last year, Tom Brevoort – who was the senior editor of all the Spider-Man books back then – told me that, 'If you're doing your job right, you will get those kinds of email by the end of it. That's when you know you're doing your job right, when people say that they don't want Otto to go.'"

THE MAN WITH THE PLAN

Following the revelation that a terminally ill Otto Octavius had actually swapped minds with his long-time nemesis, Peter Parker apparently perished in December 2012's *Amazing Spider-Man* #700's anniversary issue. With Doctor Octopus furtively taking up the web-spinner's mantle in January 2013's *Superior Spider-Man* #1, Peter's spirit made an unexpected appearance, haunting his former foe in a forlorn attempt to keep him honest. Since then, the increasingly unhinged Otto's Machiavellian plans to take control of New York's criminal underworld have gradually unravelled, coming to a head in *Superior Spider-Man* #31's final issue. "When I pitched the story to Marvel, I pitched the entire journey of the book and there was a point where I was going, 'Here's Act Three and at this point, you know that Peter is coming back,' and now everyone wants to know how," explains Slott. "That was always built into the premise and it would always crack me up whenever I'd get a fan who was mad about the book but was still buying it. When I'd ask them why they were doing that, they would say, 'I want to see how Peter is coming back!' But they would say it as if I had never thought of that and I'd be like, 'Dude, that's all part of the plan!' I totally get that that's part of the appeal. 'Peter's gone, so how is he coming back?'"

With Spidey's resurrection imminent, Slott claims that not even the most ardent fans have come close to guessing the true circumstances behind his eventual rise from oblivion. "I've seen a lot of people speculating online but no one has hit it yet," he says. "What's fun is that when I talk to other writers who need to know what happens because they have to write other Spider-Man books, whether it's *Avengers* or Chris Yost working on *Spider-Man Team-Up*, I have to tell them, 'Here's how he »

Dan Slott

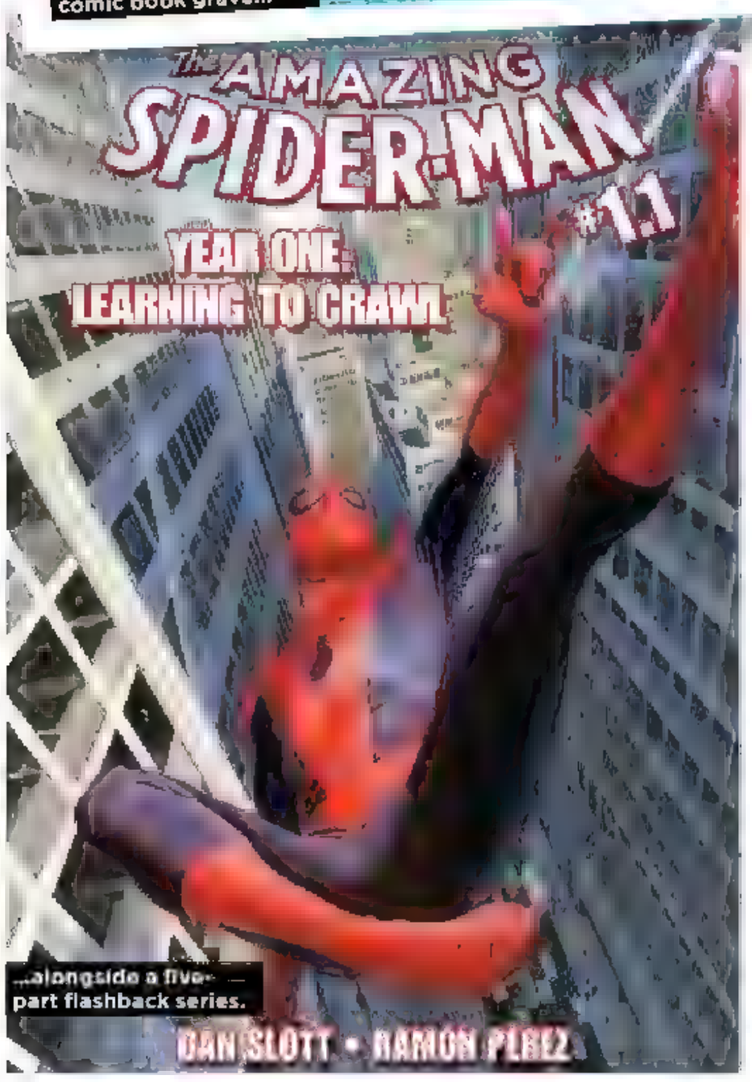
“People are going, ‘Don’t you dare kill Otto Octavius!’ and, ‘Don’t bring back Peter!’”

comes back but you've got to keep it a secret.' When I told Yost, he paused when he heard it and was like, 'That's really good! I'm happy with how he comes back.' There's also a lot of people who work with Marvel on the Marvel online games or the pinball machines, so they have access to the Marvel servers. After they read *Superior Spider-Man* #29, a lot of them cheated and went on the servers and immediately pulled down #30 because they wanted to read it right there and then, just like any fan would. Suddenly, I got all these notes from people going 'That was great! #30 is the best yet!' I'm kind of worried now about #31 because the people who read advance issues of #30 know too much."

With *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* movie also hitting cinemas this month, the time couldn't be better for Peter's much-vaunted comeback and the revival of his flagship book. "That was in the original pitch," says Slott of the not coincidental time scale. "At one point, there were people going, 'Maybe you should only do *Superior Spider-Man* for six issues.' But I was like, 'If we're going to take the

The Ditko-influenced *Learning To Crawl.*

Peter returns from the comic book grave...



...alongside a five-part flashback series.

Superior Spider-Man ends with #31.

leap, we should just take the leap, especially with Marvel Now!, and just run with it!' They then asked how long I could run with it for, and I said, 'I can take this up to the movie and then the movie is when you do the relaunch.' Then when the first sales figures came in, it was like, 'Okay, you can do it till the movie.'"

Having spent the past year or so in corporeal form, desperately battling not to be submerged by the egotistical Otto's formidable id, the Peter who re-emerges into the light of day is a very different character to the costumed crusader who preceded him. "There'll be a massive tonal change because that's how any of us would feel if we were Peter Parker and we'd 'died' and then come back," reasons Slott. "He's been given a second chance and if you know anyone who has had that kind of near-death experience, when they come back they're like, 'This time I'm going to make it work, this time I'm going to stop and smell the roses and do everything that I wanted to do.' There's going to be a different attitude to this Spider-Man. He's still going to be Peter Parker and he's the character that we all know and love but he's just gone through this big thing, so there will be a different take."

THE MISSING STORY

After April's *Amazing Spider-Man* #1, May will see the arrival of *Year One: Learning To Crawl*, a special historical storyline illustrated by Ramón Pérez (*Wolverine And The X-Men*) that will harken back to Peter's formative experiences as a fledgling superhero. "After we bring *Amazing Spider-Man* back, it will be a monthly comic and simultaneously we'll be doing a five-issue series off to the side, which will be about the first 60 days of Peter Parker being Spider-Man, starting from the minute that *Amazing Fantasy* #15 came to an end," says Slott of the arc, which will begin in *Amazing Spider-Man* #1.1. "It'll be like now he's learned the lesson of power and responsibility and you're going to see some things that haven't been seen before: things that got cut out of the comic that weren't in there One thing that we've never seen in a Spidey comic – although there was a scene of it in one of the black and white magazines and we've also seen it in the movies – is Uncle Ben's funeral. So, 'What

> **"I'm either going to find out how to do this or die"**

was that like and what was going on?' You'll have to read it to find out."

Most intriguingly, Slott will be introducing a new, previously unseen member of Spidey's rogues' gallery. "Who that villain is and why they do what they do is really fun and very thematic to *Spider-Man*," he teases. "In the past, when we've seen miniseries like this or story arcs set in the past and there's a villain that we didn't know about, it's always been sold with that trope of, '...And they were the mastermind, who was secretly pulling the strings!' But this is not that. This is like, 'What if Stan Lee and Steve Ditko had created one extra villain?' Someone in the vein of Electro or Mysterio. There's this one extra guy so why haven't we seen him before and what don't we know about him? He's not this great mastermind, he's just another great Spidey villain and that's a horrible thing to do to your artist. To go, 'Hey, Ramón Pérez, can you design somebody who looks like somebody Steve Ditko would have designed?' So there's no small challenge there!"

Describing his work as suitably "amazing!" Slott is impressed with the classical sense of composition that Pérez has brought to the project. "He won an Eisner for *Tales Of Sand* and anyone who has read that book knows that he deserved it as it was really gorgeous," he says of the adaptation of the Jim Henson property the Canadian-born artist did for Archaia Entertainment; it won three accolades including Best Penciller/ Inker at the prestigious 2012 Comic Industry Awards. "There's also an eight-page prequel story that appears in *Amazing Spider-Man* #1, which just looks really beautiful. He draws the best Spider-Man because he's not just drawing the Amazing Spider-Man you're used to, he's drawing the Amazing Spider-Man that existed in those first couple of issues all those years ago with the big, bulbous spider, the little tiny eyes and the giant webs under the arms. It's awesome!"

GET INTO THE GROOVE

Bringing to mind Frank Miller and David Mazzucchelli's revisionist approach on *Batman: Year One* and Alex Ross's more reverential work on *Marvels*, Slott has enjoyed putting his own subtle stamp on Stan Lee and Steve Ditko's seminal stories. "If you look at the person Peter Parker was in *Amazing Spider-Man* #1 and #2, which is four stories because there were two stories each issue, he's a very different character even from the character he is in *Amazing Spider-Man* #3, where he's patrolling for crime for the first time and having these adventures," he says. "A lot of that is Stan and Steve just starting a book and trying to get the rhythm right, but thematically on some level it's also Peter finding his rhythm and discovering who he really is. You start finding out that there's a reason why he does those things and starts off that way as this kind of character. He makes that journey and becomes that character and this is that story."

Silver Surfer

As if bringing Peter Parker back from the dead weren't enough of a challenge, Slott faces an even tougher task when it comes to turning *The Silver Surfer* into a viable monthly book. Looking to his favourite Time Lord for inspiration, his answer was to give Norrin Radd a human foil in the form of the enigmatic Dawn Greenwood. "We totally looked at this as, 'How would Russell T Davies reboot *Silver Surfer*?'" he reveals. "But we're not going to be time travelling. We're just going through space, but we're not *just* going through space – we're going through Marvel space! So you're going to see corners of the Marvel Universe that you've never seen before. But the surfboard is not the TARDIS; there's no room on this board so it's all very close quarters. And while every companion seems to have a magic cellphone on which they can talk to loved ones, once you've left Earth in this book, it becomes a very distant memory. You don't get to talk to your parents or your friends because you're off in space!"

Slott also credits his artistic partner Mike Allred with defining the series' distinctive timeless, Kirby-esque look. "As much as I want to say it's the *Doctor Who* Silver Surfer, at the end of the day it's really Mike Allred's Silver Surfer," he says. "Mike's also the first Silver Surfer artist, who is actually a surfer himself. And he's also in a rock band. He's just awesome!"

With co-scripter Christos Gage helping Slott out on *Superior Spider-Man* whenever his workload previously threatened to overwhelm him, you have to wonder how he juggles *Silver Surfer* with his *Spider-Man* commitments. "I don't!" he laughs. "Instead I'm going slowly mad as there have been way too many weeks lately where I've been getting about four hours sleep a night. I'm either going to find out how to do this or I'm going to die this year. These books will kill me!"

***Amazing Spider-Man** #1 is published on April 30 and **Learning To Crawl** begins May 7. **Silver Surfer** is out now.*

ALL THIS AND MORRISON

Grant Morrison talks to **Calum Waddell** about Satanism, Wonder Woman and Batman's sex life...

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Glasgow-born Grant Morrison has been one of the UK's most consistent and creative comic book voices for decades. Kicking off his career with such underground greats as *Captain Clyde*, the Scottish surrealist brought a subversive sense of humour to *2000 AD* with his long-running *Zenith* serial. *Zenith* was recently released as part of a hardback collection, with Morrison at the heart of a legal row over the rights to the strip – although it's hardly his first collision with controversy. Some of Morrison's most memorable moments include his "unique" and fan-dividing spins on such DC institutions as *Batman* and *Superman* and urging readers to engage in spontaneous masturbation over a sacred symbol in order to manifest more sales for his pet project *The Invisibles*. There are also the famous feuds – most notably Alan Moore (who claims Morrison was once a fan of his and who has taken a dig at the writer's MBE) and fellow Scot Mark Millar (over authorship of an issue of *The Authority*). Yet such factors only contribute to making Morrison one of the most consistently fascinating comic book figures.

Having also penned the likes of *Animal Man*, *Doom Patrol* and Marvel's *New X-Men*, as well as unleashing his well received book *Supergods: Our World In The Age Of The Superhero*, it is clear that one of the industry's most inspirational minds shows no sign of slowing down.

Later this year will be a fresh spin on *Wonder Woman* and a return to the Justice League as part of DC's hotly anticipated *Multiversity* series.

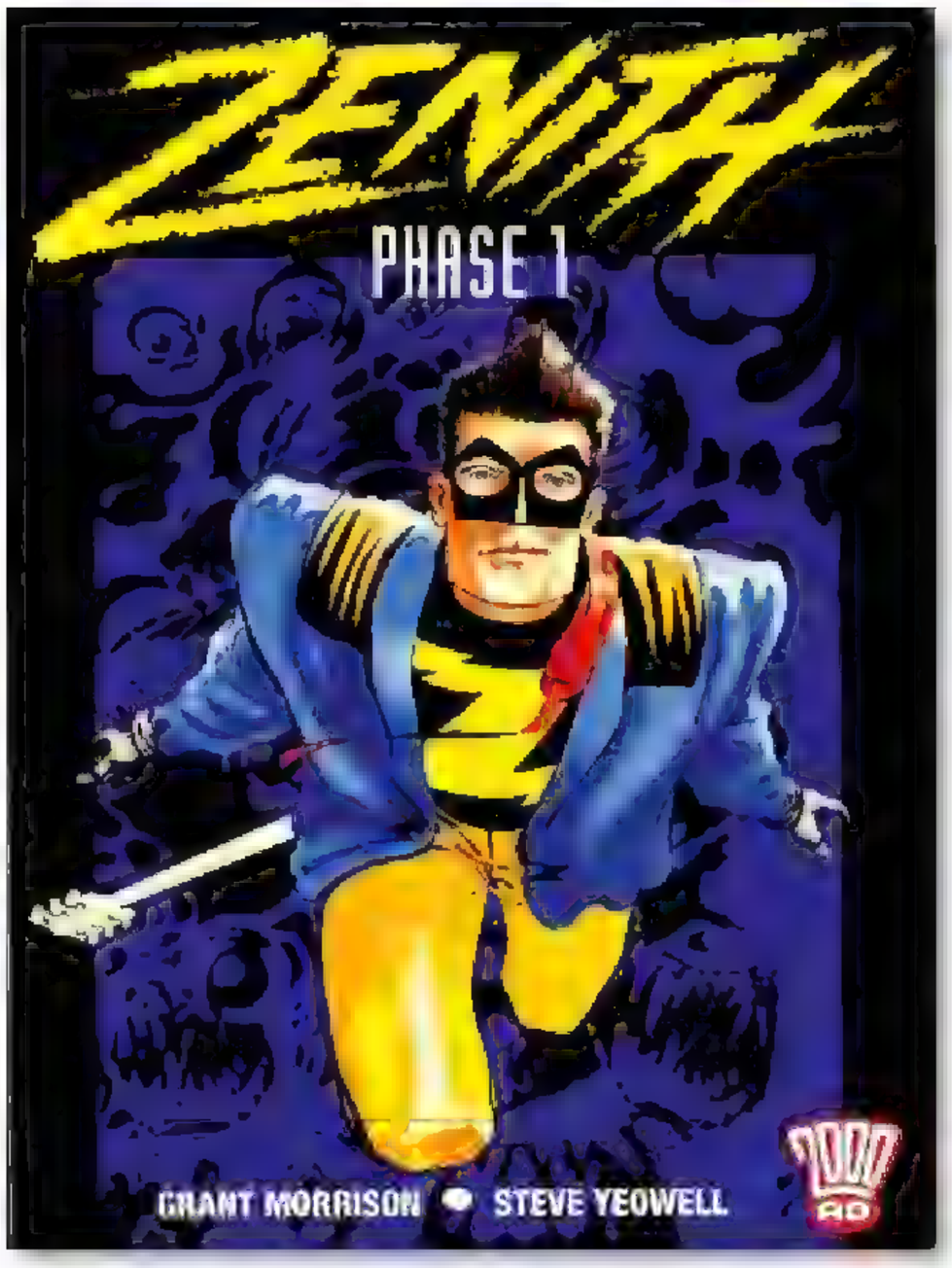
Comic Heroes: Let's begin with the re-release of *Zenith*. Did you ever see yourself devising new stories for him?
Grant Morrison: "I did want to go back to him. Absolutely. I always imagined that would happen. I hoped that in some future time, which has probably arrived, we could go back to Zenith as a late forties, fat version of himself. He's all washed up, maybe a bit like Elvis in his later years! But obviously that won't happen any time soon."

CH: Presumably that's because of the well-documented legal issues...
GM: "Yeah, all I can say about that is what is out there and public already. We sent legal letters and we spent £5,000 on lawyers. We wanted to discuss *Zenith* and no one replied."

CH: On the plus side, the compilation of *Zenith* has been met with a lot of fanfare. Would you ever consider doing a similar compilation focused on *Captain Clyde*?
GM: "I've still got all of the *Captain Clyde* stuff so it is possible, but I'm not really interested in stuff from the past. I've never thought about putting them all out again. I mean, never say never, but probably not. To me it is just something that I did when I was very young. My feeling, rightly or wrongly is just, 'Who cares?'"

CH: Did you enjoy your time at *2000 AD* in the '80s? It's seen as the golden era of »

Above: Clockwise from left, *Zenith*, Morrison's breakthrough work mystical team book *The Invisibles*, and his recent exploration of the superhero myth, *Supergods*



LONDON: MAY 8, 1887
ZENITH
4: HISTORY LESSONS
LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHTENED OUT.
YOU'RE ASKING ME TO HELP YOU BECAUSE NAZIS FROM ANOTHER DIMENSION ARE TRYING TO TAKE OVER THE WORLD AND ONLY YOU CAN STOP THEM?
I'LL TELL YOU THE KIND OF HELP YOU NEED.
AFTER ALL, THIS IS RUBY FOX. SHE USED TO BE A SUPERHUMAN LIKE YOU AND SHE WAS A GOOD FRIEND OF YOUR MUM AND DAD'S...
YOU...
NOW, NOW, GIVE THE LADY A CHANCE, ROBERT.
LISTEN, WE'RE MAKING A VIDEO HERE, EDDIE!
2000AD Credit Card
SCRIPT ROBOT GRANT MORRISON
ART ROBOT STEVE YEOWELL
LETTERING & ROBOT MARK [illegible] KING
COMPU-73

the comic by many fans...

GM: "I loved my time doing *Zenith*. That was a great time at *2000 AD*. It was the Pat Mills era and there was some amazing stuff being created. It was brilliant."

CH: Are you still writing the *Rogue Trooper* movie?

GM: "Unfortunately there's nothing new to say about that. I don't even know if it's going to happen at this point. Obviously I'd love it to, but I honestly have no idea."

CH: That's unfortunate. I'd have thought the *Dredd* film might have indicated a future for more *2000 AD* movies. Speaking of which, how did you enjoy *Dredd*?

GM: "I thought it was brilliant. I'd have liked to see a bit more of the weirdness of Mega-City One but maybe that's something they'll do if they make another movie."

CH: What about Judge Death?

GM: "That'd be great wouldn't it? That seems to be the obvious way to go for a sequel. I'd like to see them bring more of the surreal and maddening aspects of *Dredd* to the cinema. Judge Death definitely has to make an appearance!"

Above: The eponymous star of *Zenith* is a chart topping, hard partying, bed hopping pop star

"I did actually practice Satanism for six months in the '90s, just to get a feel for it"

CH: You've courted fan controversy in the past by taking some totems of comic book lore and changing them entirely. I'm thinking of the African-American version of Superman, for instance...

GM: "Yeah, I loved doing that – and he's coming back in this *Multiversity* series that's out later this year. I'm creating a new Justice League from across the DC universe and Superman is going to have an increasingly bigger role in that.

CH: And then, in 2006, you introduced Damian Wayne to the *Batman* mythology – the violent, illegitimate son of Bruce...

GM: "Yeah, some *Batman* fans didn't like that, but a lot of them did. They really saw what I was trying to do with the character. I wanted to make Batman seem more like a real human being again and one who also has a sex life. I mean, come on, he's Bruce Wayne, he's a playboy, he's rich, he's surrounded by beautiful women, but at the time I was doing the character that had sort of fallen by the wayside. So I wanted to introduce the idea that in the past he'd been out having fun and enjoying himself and Damien had come from that period. But I also liked the idea of just embracing the potential for the character to go in very different and totally crazy directions. We'd been seeing the depressed Batman for a long time – this guy who was wrestling with his soul and never seemed to enjoy his life, so my take was just something different."

CH: There were satanic undertones in a lot of your Batman stuff. For instance, you had the character of Dr Simon Hurt, who was implied to be Satan himself...

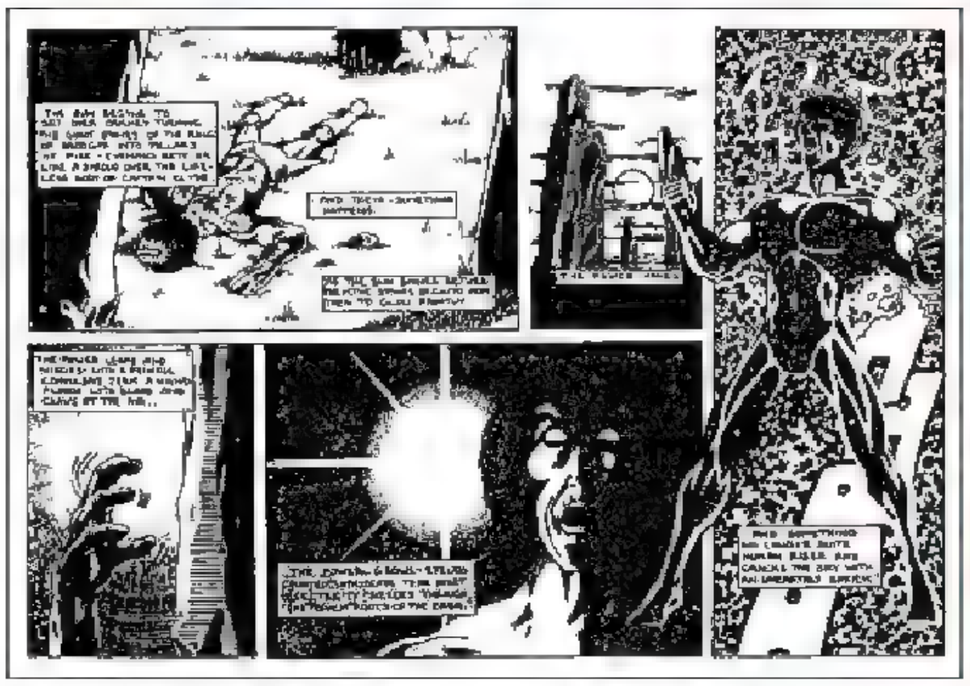
GM: "Aye, it's interesting because I did actually practice Satanism for six months in the '90s, just to get a feel for it. So some of that influence is probably still there..."

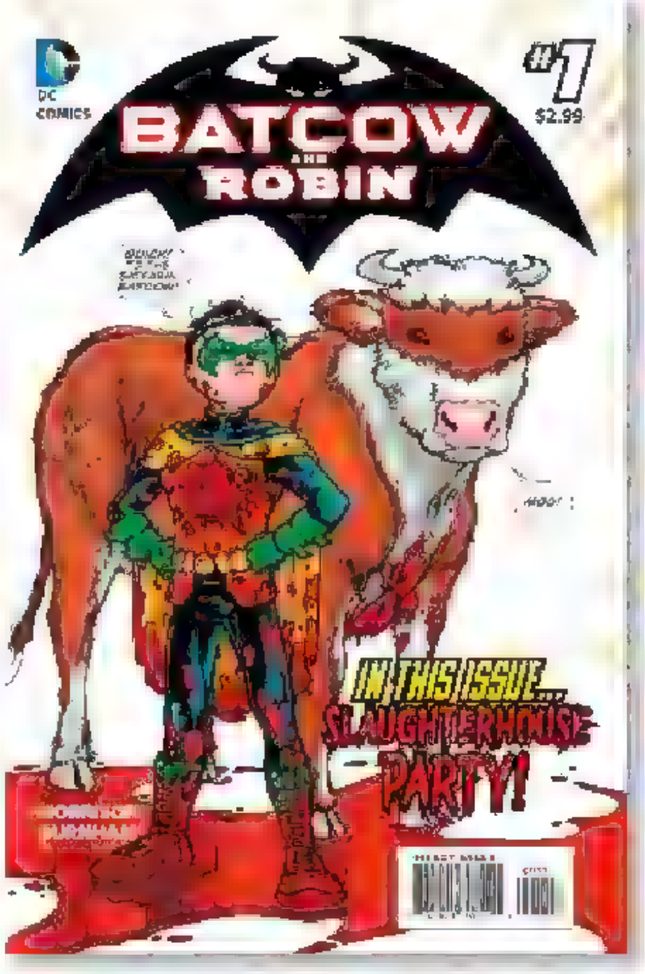
CH: Did anything demonic happen?

GM: "Demonic things were easy to make happen, especially in the '90s! Satanism is very material – it's all about getting things. I already had the stuff I needed so that never appealed to me."

CH: Did you draw any inspiration from Church Of Satan founder Anton LaVey?

NO, I'M DOCTOR HURT NOW.
AS FOR "MASTER BRUCE" AND WHATEVER SHREDS OF HIS IDENTITY STILL REMAIN...
...DID I SAY WE WERE FINISHED WITH HIM?





GM: "Nah man, he seemed like a circus dude to me! I never liked that aspect of Americana – the showbiz element, you know? He was like a carnival barker or a character out of *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. I did read both of his books but that was it."

CH: Changing topic a little, did you see *Man Of Steel*? What were your thoughts?
GM: "I thought it was intriguing. I've seen the original *Superman* Richard Donner made so many times that I wanted the genesis story to just be over and done with so we could get on with the rest of it. Ultimately he's going to fight Batman next and that's going to be interesting. I'm looking forward to what they do with that."

CH: What hopes do you have for the *Justice League* movie, if it ever happens?
GM: "It's hard to say. David Goyer is the writer again and he's behind the blockbuster, large-scale feel of a lot of these films. I really admire what he does and, of course, it's his take on *Justice League* so I expect it will be very different from mine, as it should be. I'm definitely looking forward to it."

CH: Do you think there is any chance he might have been inspired by anything you did with *Justice League*?
GM: "No, I doubt any of the stuff I did with *Justice League* back in the '90s will show up in the new movie. I'm not sure I'd want that anyway. I want to see how Goyer brings all of these characters together and I want to see him do his own thing with them. I expect that'll write a very good script. I really enjoyed his *Batman* trilogy."

CH: You've often talked about your love of another DC icon, the Flash. Why have you never tackled him?

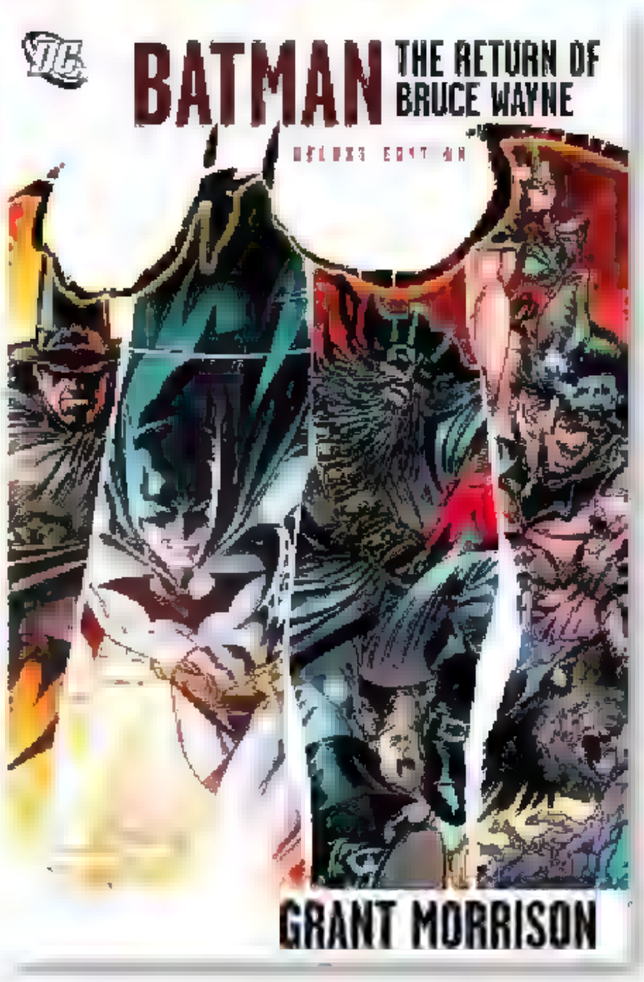
Above: Morrison's first superhero strip was *Captain Clyde*, bottom left he's since written many more for DC including, clockwise from top left, *Action Comics*, *Doctor Hurt*, *Doom Patrol*, *JLA* and *Batcow And Robin*

GM: "Yeah, I really want to do the Flash and one day I'm sure I will. I just haven't gotten around to it. I've had offers to do a one-off Flash story but I want to do a lot more. I really want to do a different take on him..."

CH: It wouldn't be Grant Morrison if you didn't!
GM: "Aye, you know, I want to explore what happens when you can run at the speed of light – really get into the science of it all. He's really the only superhero that I've not done yet that I still want to do. *The Flash* was the first comic book that I ever read."

CH: Returning to your early work – such as *Captain Clyde* and *Zenith* – it was very political, very anti-Thatcher. Can you talk about your thoughts regarding using the comic book medium for political ends?
GM: "Well, Thatcher was the devil to me. I came from a working class background and my mother despised her. My father despised her. They were big supporters of the miners and so on. So there was this »

Is this really how you wish it was with Jean?
Oh, Scott.. you're making me lose control.
I'm going to explode with passion and fry the stars, darling...



absolute hatred for her. But although I've done a lot of anti-Thatcher pieces it was not really grounded in her politics. It was more class hatred. If you asked me about her now, I'd tell you she's just an old woman who has died. A lot of what she did affected people badly – but all politics tend to affect people badly.

"I'm not really into politics. I tend to believe any rhetoric as long as it's intellectually convincing to me at the time. But much later on I find myself thinking, 'No, I don't agree with that at all.' I tend not to buy into any one position. I like to read across the spectrums and encounter all the ways that people have of solving problems. I think every way is valid to some extent, maybe not to the same extent, but I'd never feel right about committing to any one view and then expressing that through my work."

CH: In other words, it's more about what makes a good story, right?

GM: "I just feel that if people are looking to me for ideas then I don't want there to be any misunderstanding. I don't have a big interest in politics so I try not to let that come through. My mum and my dad were so into politics that, as a kid, especially if you're a young boy, you tend to want to go against what your parents like. My dad did the exact opposite of what his dad did as well, you know? So I spent a lot of my young life going on protest marches with my dad and I felt that he knew his shit but, honestly, I didn't care as much."

Above: Morr son made a huge impact on the Batman mythos and played a key role in the revamp of the entire X Men franchise

CH: Do you miss the days of fanzines? A copy of your old fanzine, *The White Tree*, recently sold on eBay for £100...

GM: "I thought it was really weird when *The White Tree* sold for £100. I have a whole cupboard of them at home. They're just sitting in there rotting away. I'm thinking of chucking them out into the audience at the next fan convention I do! But, yeah, I definitely miss the fanzine years."

CH: It's harder for a writer to break through just using the internet isn't it? There are so many voices out there now...

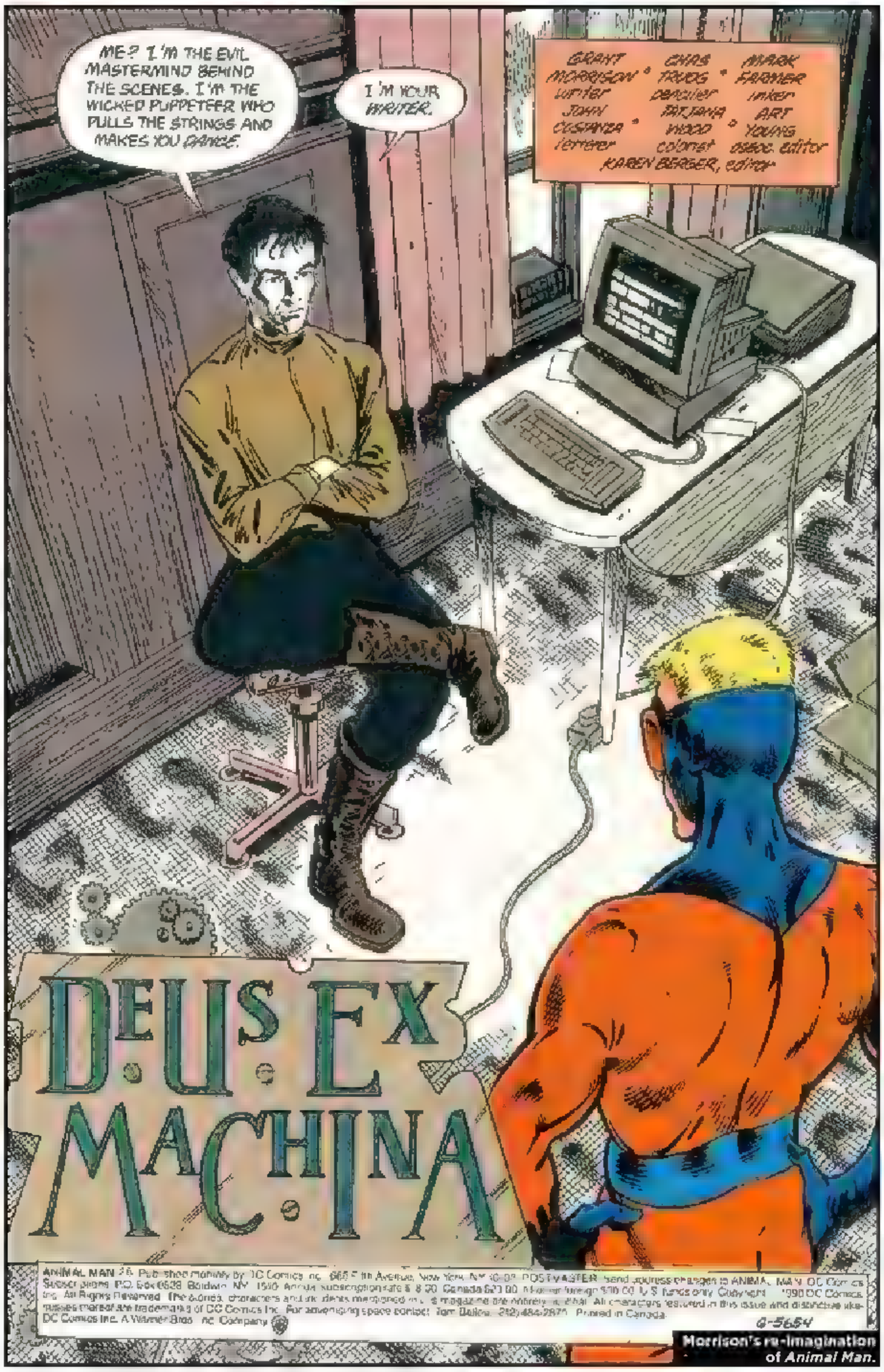
"That's the problem isn't it? The population just keeps growing. There were four billion people on the planet in the '70s and now there's almost double that. So many people, even in the developing parts of the world, are wired up to the internet and everyone has something to say. There's now a media that allows that – and it's fantastic and democratic – but it also means that there are a lot of voices drowning each other out. Back in the day it was kind of fun to make your own stuff, print your own copies, put the staples in and take them to the shops. It was exciting."

CH: The great thing about fanzines was that they were also very personal – someone had to be pretty dedicated just to go to the bother of printing it in the first place...

GM: "Absolutely – and we had stuff in my fanzine that was printed out of order but we just went with it and pretended it was all part of some surrealist joke. It became part of its charm. It was favourably reviewed in *The Observer*, which is hilarious. It was all just an accident but they took it as part of the joke."

CH: Okay a few last questions: who is the worst superhero character of all time?

GM: "Aw man, I like them all."


ME? I 'M THE EVIL MASTERMIND BEHIND THE SCENES. I 'M THE WICKED PUPPETEER WHO PULLS THE STRINGS AND MAKES YOU DANCE.
I 'M YOUR WRITER.
GRANT MORRISON • writer
CHAS TRUOG • penciller
MARK FARMER • inker
JOHN COSPANICH • letterer
TATJANA WOOD • colorist
ART YOUNG • assoc. editor
KAREN BERGER, editor
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Morrison's re-imagination of *Animal Man*.

The Trial Of Diana Prince

Coming up later this year is Morrison's 120-page Wonder Woman one-shot, *The Trial Of Diana Prince*, with art by Yanick Paquette. "If readers were seeing it in pieces, they'd get really mad at me," Morrison has said of the project. "It's quite provocative. But if you read all 120 pages, it's totally self-contained, it makes sense. So I'm hoping people will respond to it as a complete piece."

CH: What can we expect? And why do you think, despite being one of the most famous comic book characters in history, Wonder Woman has never managed to achieve the same success as Batman or Superman?
GM: "I think some of the recent Wonder Woman stuff has been really good. A lot of people have tried to bring her back to the forefront, men and women, and they often have a good position on the character but it has just never really come together. I just don't think the character survived the death of her creator, William Marston."

CH: Why do you think that is?
GM: "William bought all of these psychological ideas into the script of the character. I think she was a very personal character for him. When he passed away I feel like there was a bit of a question about what to do next. There was an attempt in the '60s to do Wonder Woman a bit like *I Love Lucy* – and she was constantly chasing Steve Trevor and hoping she would get married! Then in the '70s she was a much more feminist Wonder Woman. So she's kind of changed with the times but never been allowed to regain that bizarre sexuality that was in all of these early stories when Marston was in charge. So what I'm trying to do is bring that element back without being exploitative."

CH: I presume you mean the sort of bondage-sexual-dominatrix element of her character?
GM: "Yeah, I think there needs to be that element, for sure. That is not really a kink of mine but it really needs to be there. But, like I said, there are other ways too. The Linda Carter version of Wonder Woman worked. I suppose you could say that presented Wonder Woman as a girl scout, but the public loved it. That old television series was very popular. So there are several different ways to do Wonder Woman and we're just trying to find the right one at the moment – but it will definitely be faithful to the source."

CH: If you ask a lot of people to describe the genesis story of Wonder Woman they might draw a blank...
GM: "Oh absolutely – I agree. I find that most people don't know the story behind Wonder Woman and that's another problem."

CH: Why do you think that her background has never become as widely known as, for instance, Batman or Superman?
GM: "Batman's parents were shot. Superman's planet was blown up. These are easy to remember and easy to work with. Wonder Woman is a lot more complex. Her character is a complex web of female relationships. In a way Wonder Woman is more suited to a Jane Austen novel than a comic book which is aimed at boys."

❝ Ask me about Thatcher now and I'd tell you she's an old woman who has just died ❞

CH: Have you ever seen the Turkish version of *Batman*?
GM: "I never knew there was one. That sounds interesting though – Batman in Istanbul instead of Gotham City!"

CH: What do you have coming up next?
GM: "*Annihilator* is coming out with Frazer Irving. He's just finished the first issue and it has his great 'painting with light' style. I'm really proud of it. *Multiversity* and *Wonder Woman* are out later this year and I'm excited about both of them. I'm writing a few screenplays but I can't say anything else I'm afraid. You never know what'll happen."

CH: Is there any chance of you working on more videogames, given that you collaborated on *Predator: Concrete Jungle* and *Battlestar Galactica*?
GM: "No, we pursued so much in that area. We almost set up a videogame company but it became so complicated that I decided not to explore it any further."

CH: And, just finally, how do you feel about receiving an MBE?
GM: "I don't know, man. It doesn't give me any extra powers! If I could walk up walls or something that would be great. But, yeah, it was nice to be given it and to be deemed worthy of it. You can't argue with that, can you?" CH

Annihilator, Multiversity and Wonder Woman are all out later this year.

THE POWER BEHIND THE THRONE

With one current comic about superpowered Royals and another about a non-superpowered plumber, Rob Williams is clearly still the same Cla$$ warrior who wrote his first comic 12 years ago, discovers **Dave Golder**

Rob Williams seems a little disappointed at the press reaction to *The Royals: Masters Of War*. Or rather lack of it. "When you consider how the mainstream press went barmy over that gay Dredd story that I wrote, you'd think they might have the decency to get all hot and bothered about making the Royal Family superpowered!" he laughs.

Maybe we can print something out of context that the *Daily Mail* could happily misinterpret?

"Yes! If we could still achieve that, it would be wonderful!" agrees Williams. He then quickly adds, "I don't want to sound conniving, but I did think with the Royal Family on the front of every paper we might get picked up."

You wouldn't have thought *The Royals* needed any extra publicity considering the kind of reviews it's been getting. "Yeah. I think it's the best reviewed thing, across the board, that I've ever done," admits Williams, sounding slightly embarrassed. "That sounds really arrogant, but it's not meant to. It's just really nice. All the reviews were really glowing and I just hope that translates into sales."

Arrogance is not something you'd accuse Williams of having in abundance. Despite a rich Welsh accent that immediately suggests an air of supreme self-confidence, he spends much of the interview deflecting compliments, praising his collaborators and sipping thoughtfully on his coffee when asked to analyse his own contributions. He's arrived for the interview – at the cafe in the Bristol Watershed arts centre – by bus and needs to leave in time to pick up the kids. In a country that usually produces comic book writers at the more eccentric end of the spectrum, you just know that Williams is going to favour a five-a-side match over dabbling in black magic any day.

Comic Heroes: For a writer whose name seems to be everywhere in the comics world these days – you're currently behind two creator-owned titles, *The Royals* and *Ordinary*, as well as working on Titan's new *Doctor Who* range – you had a relatively late start in the industry, didn't you?

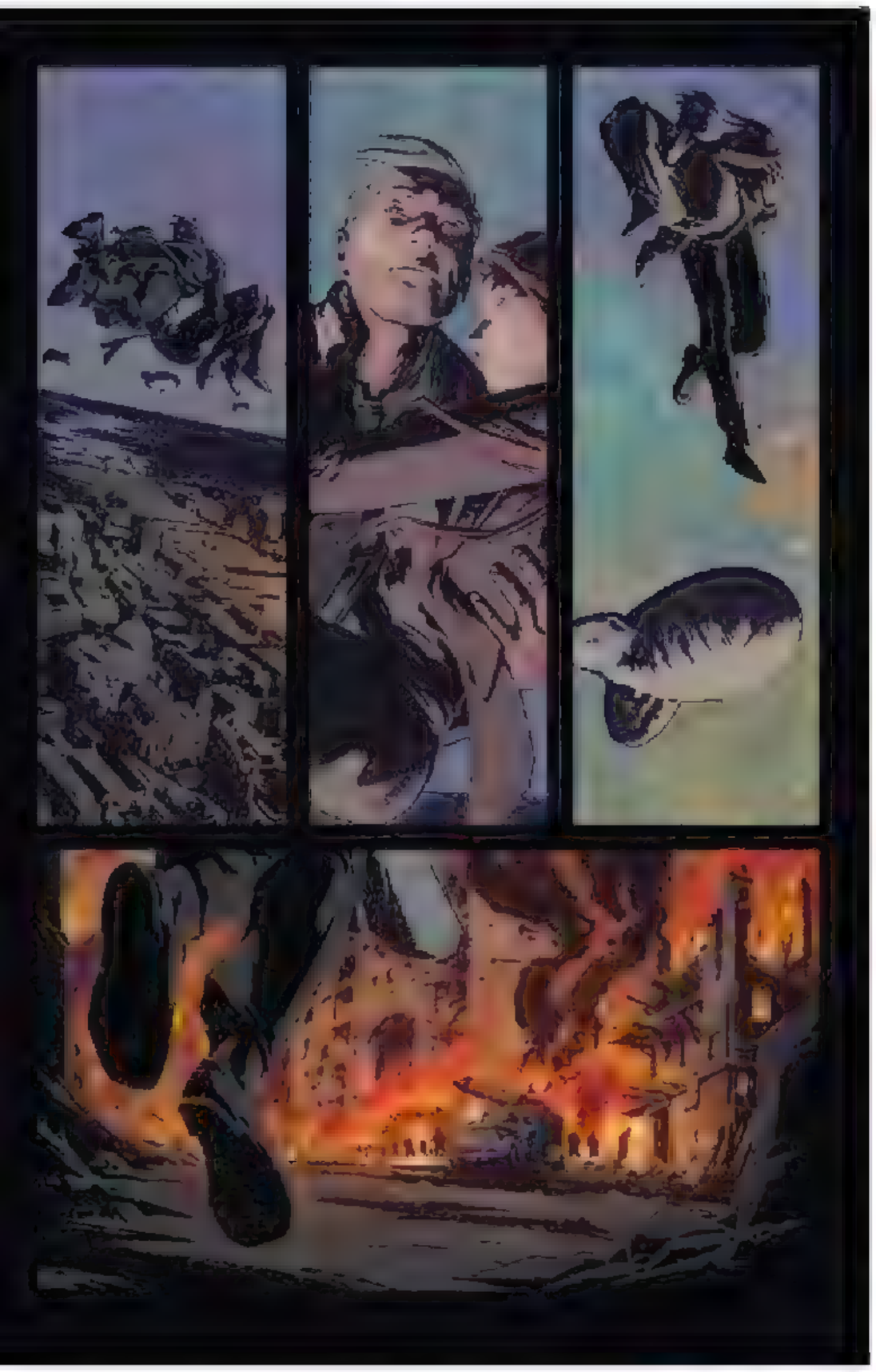
RW: "I was a freelance journalist. I'd always been a comics fan. I think I was about 29 or 30 before I even thought about writing my own comic script. I pitched one Future Shock to *2000 AD* and received a reply from the then editor, David Bishop, saying, 'Congratulations, you've sent in the most unoriginal Future Shock we've ever received at *2000 AD* – we first published it in 1978!' He'd dug it out, photocopied it, stuck it in the envelope and sent it to me. So that was a good way to start.

"But then I found out through freelance contacts that a new publisher – Com.x – was starting up and I gave them a script: the first issue of *Cla$$war* – and they liked it funnily enough. Everything else went from there. All the doors were shut, then people liked *Cla$$war* and suddenly I was asked if I'd be interested in writing for *2000 AD*, and Marvel were open to pitches.

"I think I was enormously lucky for a number of reasons. One was the fact that I didn't know what I was doing and I gave Com.x the full script, not a pitch. I mean, who reads full scripts? Not only that, they paired me with an amazing artist, Trevor »

Above: Dredd tries to work out wh ch way he swings n 2013's "Closet"
Opposite: Big boats! A squadron of planes! Coleby heaven

"You'd think the press would get all hot and bothered about Royals with superpowers"



Hairsine. My first published comic and I got an amazing world-class artist. I mean, one thing – if I didn't know it then I know it now 12 years later – you're only ever as good as your artist. Obviously the script has got to be there, but it's a visual medium and we just came out with a great-looking comic book. It was the first thing I'd written but it had an energy about it I think.

"I was talking to some friends last night about it and it's a completely symbiotic relationship. We were talking about the argument of who's more important, the writer or the artist in comics. I'd say it's 51% comic art maybe and 49% script because it's visual storytelling and I think if there was a case of a bad script and good art, or bad art and a good script, the comic with the good art wins the day. The art can carry a lot of sins."

CH: So did you have any idea about how a comic script was presented back then?

RW: "No, I think the Future Shock was just a paragraph, like the perfect example of how not to do it, you know? I just hadn't done the research. Back then the internet wasn't quite the resource it is now. I had no idea how to format scripts or pitches but now there's this whole wealth of reading material online and you can see how professionals lay out comic scripts. Before that, I remember Neil Gaiman put a script in the back of one of the *Sandman* graphic novels and I think John Wagner did some kind of 'this-is-how-a-comic-script-is-written' in a *2000 AD* annual. But those things were really rare. There are no excuses these days for not at least getting the format right even if you can't write for shit.

"But one of the cool things about it that you learn as you go is that no two writers do it the same way. Even now there are people who work Marvel-style – the old Stan Lee method – which is to write the major plot beats, then leave it to the artists to do the visual storytelling. Then there are people like me who prefer to do full scripts and break down every page, you know.

"But even within that set of writers there are big contrasts. Alan Moore will virtually write a page of A4 notes describing a panel. Then you've got John Wagner who'll just write two words, you know? Different people, different methods."

Above: London during the Blitz bomb blasts and burning buildings
Above right: Coleby fills his pages with as much military tech as he can muster

CH: Is that how someone like Gail Simone manages to write a zillion books a month?

RW: "Well, maybe. I don't know how she works. But the Marvel method has come back in fashion a lot more for writers. A lot of them are encouraged to write that way. I mean, I'm doing something now which I can't talk about yet but..."

CH: There's always something!

RW: "Yeah, but I've been asked to do it Marvel-style when I haven't done it before. That again makes you think about the balance between writers and artists. It puts a lot more of the onus on the artist; they're suddenly even more in charge of the visual storytelling. And it can work. I mean, you look at a book like *Hawkeye* and I'm not privy to the inner workings of that book but I think part of the success of that is plainly the visual storytelling. The fact that David Aja breaks every page down into 24-panel pictures – he can do that and it can still all be clear. If I wrote a 24-panel page for a lot of artists, it'd be a mess. So, yeah, the artist can control the storytelling."

"There was a really amazing issue of *BPRD* that I loved, and I tried to break it down mathematically to see if there was »

"One thing I've learned is that you're only ever as good as your artist"

The New Who

Now that Titan has taken over publishing *Doctor Who* comics from IDW, Rob Williams is one of the writers who'll be chronicling the unseen adventures of the Eleventh Doctor.

"I'm co-writing it with Al Ewing," reveals Williams. "Simon Fraser is the launch artist and we're going to have a couple more artists on the series as well as we go.

"Al and I have worked together before – we co-wrote the *Judge Dredd* story 'Trifecta' – so we know each other. We've treated it like it's a season of the show. There's an overriding arc that we've plotted out between us and that's the main storyline throughout, if you like, and then we've got our own individual episodes. Some of them we've done as two-parters and some as single-parters.

"'Trifecta' was the first time either of us had co-written properly together in that way. We laid out the plot together and then we'd go back and forth with the dialogue. We're going to co-write a few issues of *Doctor Who* as well, which means we get to rewrite each other's dialogue, which can get a bit feisty at times. With the last issue of 'Trifecta', we went through about 23 drafts or something; one line would get changed and occasionally the other one of us would go: 'No, I liked that one,' and try to sneak it back in. Then the other one of us would try and take it out again.

"But it is genuinely really exciting just to be asked to do it, because who wouldn't want to write *Doctor Who*?

"I think the other thing I can probably say is that we've come up with all new companions and they're going to have their own arcs. We thought that if the Doctor's running around with Amy and Rory, you know the end of their story and it just cuts any drama off at the knees. We've got three new companions, which I can't say too much about at the moment, but they're going to have individual stories and hopefully, if we do our jobs right, people will care about what happens to them."

Creator Owned Vs Creator For Hire

Whenever we ask writers if they prefer working for the big companies or writing creator-owned material they always say "creator-owned". But Williams admits that handling established Marvel and DC characters doesn't have to be chore.

"Yeah, it's a thrill. Because, we're all nostalgists, and I think, if you're working for Marvel and DC, and you've loved Marvel and DC in your life at any point, there's a great delight in writing *Spider-Man* or whatever. And you're getting paid a decent rate for it. These are good things. But I think most people would say they feel more emotionally invested in their creator-owned work. It's got more freedom by the very nature of it. The actual balancing act is the fact that you've got to pay the bills as well, unless you're a really big name and you can pay your wages on creater-owned alone. The rest of us are kind of crossing our fingers and hoping for the best really."

> "I think most people would say they feel more emotionally invested in their creator-owned work"

formula behind how it worked: average number of panels on page; how many silent panels etc. I'm not sure you could ever really create that kind of formula, but it's an interesting exercise that makes you analyse how he's achieved a certain pace or atmosphere. Oh, I'm getting really heavy on process now… you're on your way to mental illness if you get your favourite comic and you're mathematically breaking it down into numbers."

CH: Have you ever been in the situation where, without naming names because that would be pretty unprofessional, you've been partnered with an artist with whom you think "I just can't make this work"?

RW: "Yeah, but you don't find out until the end. It's a train wreck thing where you don't see what's round the corner. That's why I prefer working with people like D'Israeli and other artists who send you their work along the way and who you can get a dialogue going with.

"But part of the 'industry' side of the comic book business is that with a lot of publishers, you send in the script and then the first time you see the art is when they'll send you a lettered proof so you can change dialogue to fit better. Sometimes that's great and sometimes, when you get it through, you're just there with your head in your hands because the artist just hasn't conveyed what you were going for at all and you're trying to work out how to save it.

"With *2000 AD*, usually the first time you see the art is when it's in the shops. And this is the thing, you're completely at the whim of the artist. But it works both ways. The things I do that I get the most praise for are always when I'm working with the best visual storytellers. I'm exactly the same writer, but if you work with someone who isn't as good at visual storytelling, you'll hear, 'Oh, the writing on this is terrible.'

"There's a good Warren Ellis line, which is, 'Any kind of working relationship between a comic writer and a comic artist is a bit like an arranged marriage; you only find out if they're an axe murderer once it's too late and the ceremony's happened.'

"But, you know, this is a writer's point of view. Artists will have exactly the same thing; they'll get certain scripts through and go, 'This guy hasn't got a clue what he's doing,' and they have to try and fix it."

CH: What else have you got on the go? Apart from the thing you can't talk about?

RW: "I'm doing a new series of *The Journey Of Ichabod Azrael* for *2000 AD*. It's a supernatural Western I've done a few series of. Its full title is actually *The Grievous Journey Of Ichabod Azrael (And The Dead Left In His Wake)*."

Top: *Cla$$war*, Williams's political thriller, w th superheroes
Above: In *Ordinary*, the future of human ty rests on a tardy, downtrodden, recent y divorced plumber who dreams about Scarlett Johansson

CH: If that ever features in *Comic Review*, there won't be any room for the review after we've written the headline!

RW: "Well, all my titles are short and sharp usually, but I thought. 'This is a really deliberately verbose story – no, let's have a headline that goes on for about three lines.'"

CH: But *The Royals* is your big thing…

RW: "That and *Ordinary* for Titan. *The Royals* has been in the works for a long »

time and there were periods where we wondered if it was ever going to see the light of day. And we felt really strongly about it. If nothing else, it's an amazing looking book – Simon Coleby killed himself drawing it. He put so much historical reference in it and because we decided we were going to do the World War 2 setting, we wanted everything to look as it should."

CH: So when did you start working on it?
RW: "In 2009, I think. I found the contract the other day and 2009 was on it."

CH: "Always with the same publisher?"
RW: "Originally it was going to be a Wildstorm book under DC. Then Wildstorm shut down and there was a long period where we didn't know where it was going to come out. Then fortunately, Vertigo, another imprint of DC Entertainment, liked it enough to publish it. But yeah, there was this period when we'd done all this work on it and Simon had drawn six issues and we were thinking, for all we know, this could be one of those books you hear about that never gets published. But Simon would take his portfolio to show friends at conventions and people would go: 'Oh, this is amazing!' Because, as good as it looks in comics, on Bristol board, full size, it looks even more spectacular.

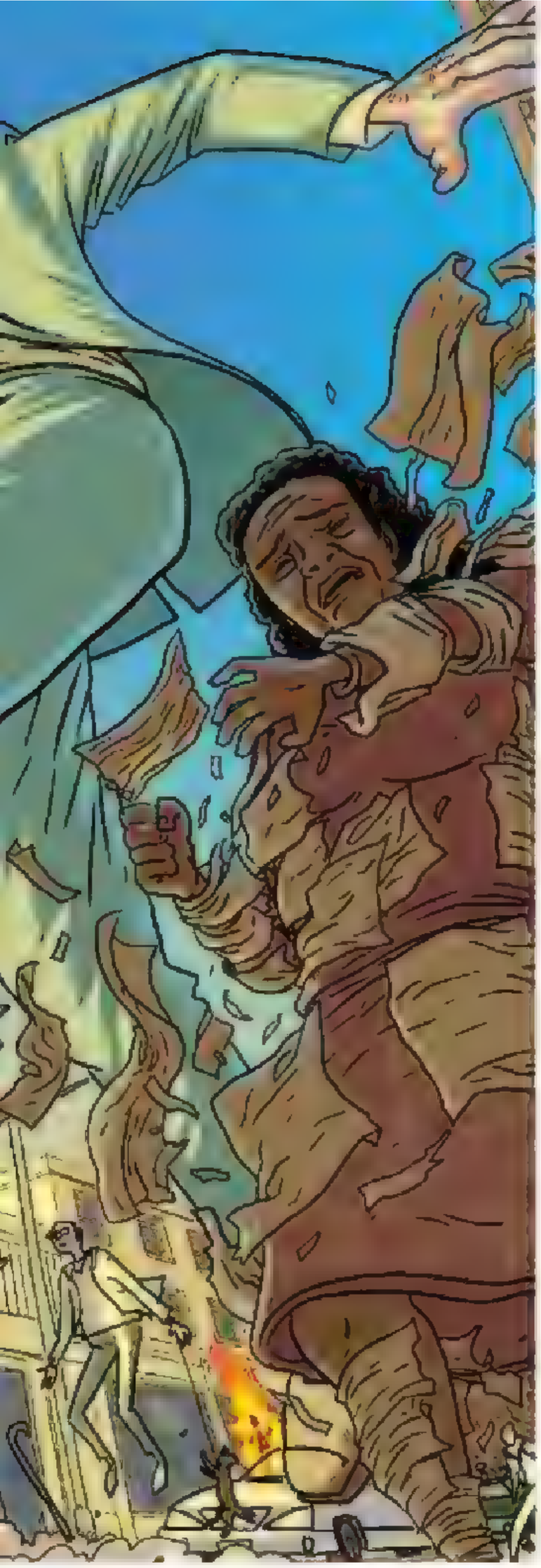
"So yeah, fortunately, finally, it's out."

CH: What was the original kernel of the idea?
RW: "Originally I was playing around with doing it in the House of Lords. And it was going to be the members of the Lords who had superpowers; basically it was a very obvious metaphor for the fact that real power is political power. But then I kind of went: 'That's really quite an obscure concept, especially for an international audience.' But I did like the element of class that it introduced. So then I thought, 'Do it with the Royal Family!' And I developed that into the whole idea of the bloodline, and the more pure the bloodline the more powerful the individual would be. And that explained a lot about inbreeding in the Royals through the centuries...!

Above left: Michael's late, L ke plumbers the world over
Above: It would appear some superpowers are more appealing than others "D git Man" ?

"It just kind of developed from there. And I think the setting is World War 2 just because Simon and I are both big World War 2 geeks. 'I want to draw World War 2 planes, Rob,' he says one day and I went: 'Well, let's come up with something.' I wish there was a sophisticated reason, but it was largely down to plane porn I'm afraid."

CH: *The Royals* also has a good reason for being a six-part series, doesn't it?
RW: "We're setting it one issue per year, throughout the conflict, against these setpieces. It gives the story a real natural spine as well: a structure. It gives a real sense of stakes and an inherent sense of drama. And huge action setpieces. But we want to be vaguely respectful. Yes, we've got big superhumans flying around, smashing things up, but you kind of want to be true to the



“My kids just think I’m some bloke who hangs around the house too often. Which is entirely true”

OH, GOD. OH SWEET BABY JESUS. THE WORLD'S ENDING AND THEY'RE ALL LOOKING AT ME EXPECTING ME TO DO SOMETHING AND I...
I'M NOT THAT KIND! I JUST WANTED TO BE IN CHARGE AND NOW... MAYBE SOMEONE ELSE SHOULD BE IN CHARGE. MAYBE. I DON'T WANT TO DIE!!! MAYBE THE SECRETARY OF STATE COULD...
DAMMIT!
THAT LOOKED DRAMATIC, RIGHT? THEY CAN SEE THAT I CARE AND...
OH...
THEY SAW THAT TOO
HOW I FEEL. SAD.
SCIENCE!!!!! THIS BOOK IS SUPPOSED TO CONTAIN OUR SMARTEST SCIENCE! WHO KNOWS HOW MUCH THE MOON CLUB WEIGHS OR SOMETHING?

superhero movies. They all have the same basic idea – in an ordinary world, one person becomes extraordinary. We thought it’d be fun to turn that on its head.”

CH: Your artist on that one is D’Israeli. What does he bring to the project?
RW: “D’Israeli’s a bit of a genius and I thank my lucky stars he agreed to draw the book. His imagination and design sense is superb, and together we were able to populate this world with imagery like a giant baseball player smashing a home run and taking out the top of the Empire State Building. He does spectacle brilliantly.

“The really nice thing about working with someone you absolutely trust in terms of storytelling is the freedom it gives you. I know if I write a silent beat or a minimal-dialogue sequence, D’Israeli will absolutely put across what I was going for. That’s not the case with all artists. Similarly, D’Israeli’s storytelling skills – the acting performances he gets from his characters – actually allows me to write subtext at times. Dialogue can be saying one thing, the look a character gives can be saying another. That’s very rare. You’ve got to be an excellent visual storyteller to carry that, and he is.

“With *Ordinary* being creator-owned, we discussed a lot of the characters and the world before we started, and there was a lot of dual input. Some of the characters, and the powers in the book, came from D’Israeli. Similarly, with a lot of the crowd scenes, where we have a load of people all with disparate powers... well, some of their powers were in the script and some weren’t. So a lot of the writing of those characters, in terms of what their powers say about them as characters, that’s down to him. It’s one of the reasons I was keen to not have traditional ‘script by’ and ‘art by’ credits on *Ordinary*. It’s purely ‘by Rob & D’Israeli’. And that suits the creator-owned ethos, I think. This is something that comes from both of us.”

Above: The New York Giants do baseball and the Big Apple shudders

CH: You’ve got a couple of children. How old are they?
RW: “Seven and four.”

CH: What do they think of your job?
RW: “They don’t think anything of it because whatever your dad does is just what your dad does. They don’t go, ‘Oh cool, my dad writes comics!’ They just think I’m some bloke who hangs around the house too often. Which is entirely true. They occasionally get freebies. But it does make you aware, you know, the majority of stuff that I write I wouldn’t give to them.

“I did an *Earth’s Mightiest Heroes* comic based on the *Avengers* cartoon. That was kind of nice, to give that to my son and think: ‘I feel completely confident that you can read that.’ I’m not going to give him my Vertigo books or *Miss Fury*, or social services would probably get involved.”

***The Royals: Masters Of War** #1 is out now from Vertigo; **Ordinary** is also out now from Titan Comics.*

spirit of the period. You don’t want to be doing it in the wrong way. Which I’m sure would be very easy to do.”

CH: You’ve also currently got *Ordinary* coming out through Titan Comics, but that’s not the first time it’s seen the light of day, is it?
RW: “It was first published in the *Judge Dredd Megazine*. They do a creator-owned slot but they don’t publicise it, so it’s not on the covers. It’s basically the magazine’s way of doing really cheap content. They pay us a tiny page rate though we retain 100% rights, and then we can reprint it elsewhere.”

CH: So what’s it about?
RW: “The ‘elevator pitch’ is: one day a plague gives everyone on the planet superpowers, apart from one guy. That person, who has always been an ordinary guy, is suddenly the most ordinary person on the planet. It was kind of inspired by watching the origin story in countless

1 **ALBUQUERQUE GALLERY**

ANIMAL MAN
#28 COVER

"When *American Vampire* entered its hiatus, I found myself without a regular gig for the first time since 2006, when I first started working for DC. There were a few options, but nothing that was exciting me that much. So Jeff asked me to draw the final arc of this cult character. More than anything, I took the job so I could work with him. I've admired Jeff for a long time, and we've been trying to collaborate for years. The project was a perfect fit."

THE ART OF...

RAFAEL ALBUQUERQUE

The Eisner Award-winning Brazilian leapt to the attention of comics fans with Vertigo's hit 2010 series *American Vampire*. Joel Pinnock invites him to share his favourite work

ARTIST PROFILE

Brazilian comic artist with a distinct scratchy style and a penchant for the dark and gritty

Porto Alegre, Brazil

http://rafaelalbuquerque.com/blog

Albuquerque started his career working for independent US publishers such as Boom! and Image but moved onto DC's superhero book *Blue Beetle*. This led to the title that made his name, *American Vampire*, co-created with writer Scott Snyder. Thanks to this hit Vertigo series, he is now able to pick and choose his own projects, offering him a luxury that not every artist is able to enjoy.

Comic Heroes: You first got noticed in America drawing teenage superhero comic *Blue Beetle* for DC. How did you find working for a US comics publisher?

Rafael Albuquerque: "When I started working on *Blue Beetle*, I was already working for foreign companies such as the Egyptian AK Comics, Boom! Studios and Image Comics. Before that, my only work for the Brazilian market was a few advertising pieces."

CH: After *Blue Beetle*, you co-created *American Vampire* with Scott Snyder. Is horror something that you have always had a natural affinity for?

RA: "I've always tried to manage my style to fit in any kind of story. *American Vampire* is not different. As much as I like horror as a genre, it wasn't the main motivation for this book. My research lay a lot more in the historical aspects than the horror itself. I was afraid that since that's the core of our book, if I tried to mimic someone else on this, it would look fake and obvious."

CH: On a related note, how liberating was it to move from a superhero book to a creator-owned Vertigo series?

RA: "A lot. Superheroes, especially DC ones, have a lot – a *lot* – of background. It's hard to put your personal vision into huge franchises such as *Batman* or *Superman*. Don't get me wrong, I love them, but publishers tend to be very protective about different approaches to their main characters. Vertigo is a place where you are working on your own stuff. You are »

2 **ALBUQUERQUE GALLERY**

BATMAN ADAPTATION

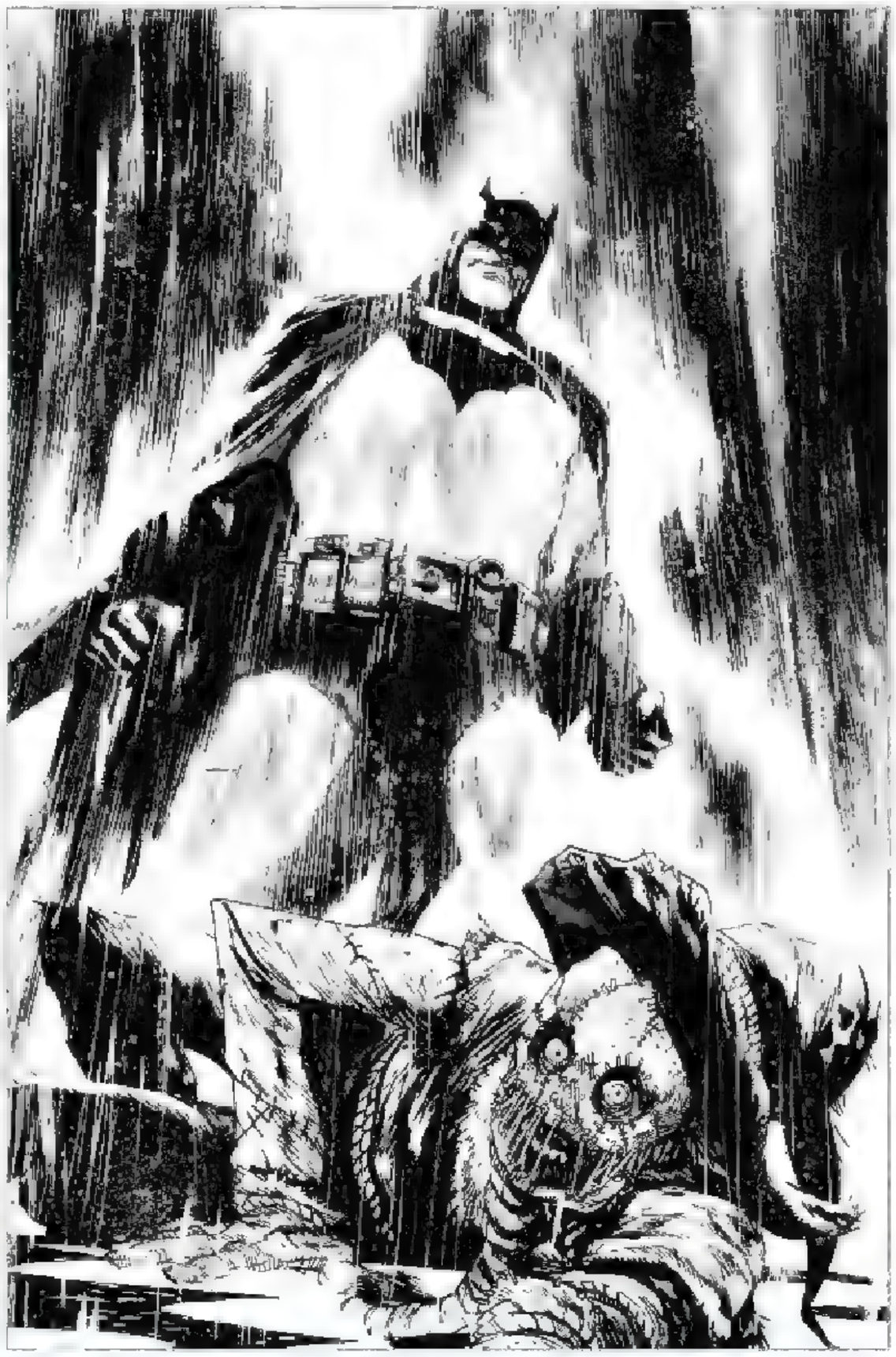
PAGE 2

"This story was originally pitched for *Batman Black And White*. Mark Chiarello needed a few days to figure out if he wanted it for the anthology or not, saying that he liked the story a lot, but because of the twisted ending, he couldn't see it as an actual Batman story. He saw it as more of an unconnected tale and that's why it was turned down. It was frustrating at first, but I got the point. Ben Abernathy, who was editing the *Legends Of The Dark Knight* digital series, felt it could be published there, though, and I was lucky enough to have my two different Batman stories come out in the same year."

building something from the ground up, so all that matters is your personal vision. That made me grow a lot as an artist, and also, it let me show my vision to the readers. That also allowed me, at this point in my career, to explore my own vision even in big mainstream characters."

CH: *American Vampire* has been one of the biggest hits at Vertigo of the past few years. How surprised were you?
RA: "Very much. We were very confident about the book, but that was also unknown territory for Scott and I. It was his very first big gig, and I was hired to do something completely different to what I was doing at the time. The story is amazing, but we can't praise enough the work of our editor, Mark Doyle, as to how well it was received. Having Stephen King aboard also doesn't hurt!"

CH: You have also worked on a *Batman Black And White* story which was published last year. How was it working »



3 ALBUQUERQUE GALLERY

BATMAN BLACK AND WHITE
PAGES 5 & 8

"*Batman Black And White* was one of my favourite miniseries when I was getting into comics. It definitely presented me to a whole lot of new creators and showed me that it's possible to bring your own unique vision to a popular and established character without losing his essence. It was a big honour being part of this project, especially writing *and* illustrating. These are my favourite pages. On page five, I really like the low angle, that shows Batman's horrified expression when he realises what happens to the bad guys, and on this splash page on page eight, we can see a very classic Batman, being a badass. I spent a lot of time doing sketches – many angles and options – but it was worth it. It's one of the coolest Batman images I've ever drawn."

-2013-

4 ALBUQUERQUE GALLERY

AMERICAN VAMPIRE
VOLUME 6 COVER

"This was the first brand new cover that we created for a collection. Vertigo usually uses one of the originals, but it felt right to do a new one in this case, considering that it's collecting *Long Road To Hell* (a story I co-wrote and drew) and the anthology, created by many authors and artists. My editor Mark Doyle wanted one strong image that could unite all those elements. I liked how it came out a lot."

5 ALBUQUERQUE GALLERY

AMERICAN VAMPIRE
SKINNER SPLASH

"I did this page for *American Vampire Anthology*, which was the first time Scott and I got back to these characters while the series was on hiatus. I love the way Skinner is in it. I think it's a strong image that shows his personality and strength. I think we succeed in giving the reader the feeling that we're back on track."

on such a recognisable comics character?

RA: "I did and it was great. The original *Batman Black And White* was one of my favourite miniseries when I started to get into comics, so being invited to be part of it, was first of all, a big honour. The other great thing is that Mark Chiarello, the editor, let me do the story my way. I could write and draw it the way I wanted, and again, showing the readers my own take on this huge character."

CH: **You've been lucky enough to work with Jeff Lemire on *Animal Man*. How did this come about?**

RA: "Very lucky. Jeff is amazing. We've known each other for a long time and we both have a mutual admiration for each other. We were trying to work together for about four years, and for one reason or another, we never could find anything. *Animal Man* came up at the perfect moment, and it couldn't have been better."

CH: ***American Vampire* returns in March. How does it feel to come back to the series that has cemented your name as a creator?**

RA: "We've done more than 30 issues and right now, I'm as nervous as I was when the book was about to launch. We are doing our best. The script for #1 is phenomenal. Probably the best thing I've read from Scott up to now. We are really confident it's gonna be bold, and people will understand why it took so long, and why we are restarting it from #1. The whole story will change a lot and a lot of questions, especially about Skinner, will be finally answered."

CH: **The series always feel very collaborative – and you've written some of the stories – so has it become more of a team effort as the series has progressed? How closely involved are you with the writing?**

RA: "Every time Mark, Scott and I have the chance to meet, usually at conventions or something, we have a big *American Vampire* brunch. That's where we pretty much discuss a year of stories. It's a big brainstorm, where we have free rein to put our ideas out. Scott is a genius. He has this amazing skill to take all those ideas and make them work in the script. I was flattered when he let me write *Long Road To Hell*, an oversized tale that came out last year. We are always Skyping as well, so he always helps me out a lot every time I'm trying to write something myself."

CH: **It seems that South American artists such as yourself, and Eduardo Risso and Ariel Olivetti, who are both from Argentina, produce work with a very distinctive flavour that's different from the American approach to comics. Do you think that's a fair comment, and if so, why do you think that's the case?**

RA: "I appreciate that. I believe they are both amazing artists. I cannot speak for everybody, but I believe my style is a bit different from the usual because I have some unusual influences. Italian and Argentinean comic book creators are among my favourites and they definitely shaped a lot of my artistic approach."

CH: **Finally, now you've taken the leap into writing your own work, will we see more stuff that is both written and drawn by yourself?**

RA: "Definitely. I'm working on another creator-owned book that will be announced soon. Something I'm co-writing and illustrating. I'm very positive about it."

all images © 2014 INJ Culbard

CELESTIAL BODIES

After stamping his mark on classic authors such as HP Lovecraft and Arthur Conan Doyle, INJ Culbard tells Stephen Jewell why he's going sci-fi with *Celeste*

When Ian "INJ" Culbard unexpectedly fainted on the tube two decades ago, he probably didn't think that it would provide the inspiration for his first original graphic novel for SelfMadeHero after several literary adaptations. But now the Nottingham-based artist has channelled that disturbing experience into *Celeste*, a phantasmagoric exploration of the end of the world that spans the upper reaches of the Earth's atmosphere to the intimate depths of inner space.

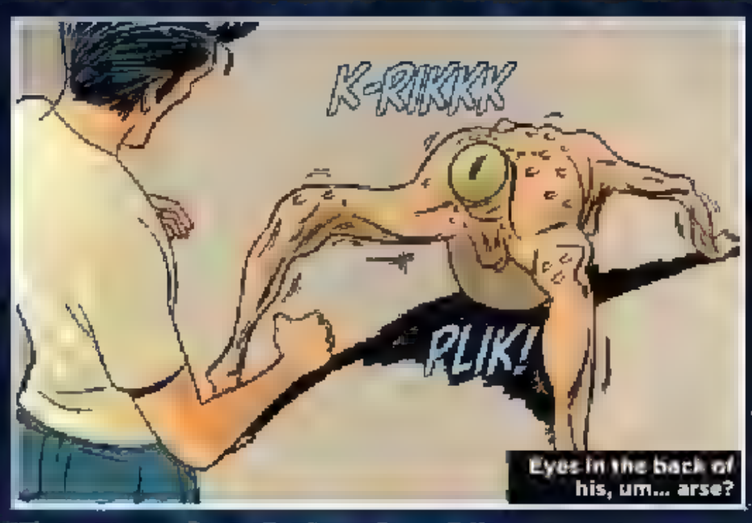
"I'd never experienced anything quite like it before," he recalls. "I was on the District line travelling through Earl's Court when I passed out. It was rush hour and the carriage was packed. I felt this peculiarly hot sensation on my lips and every breath I was expelling felt unusually hot and then I had this horrific pain in my gut."

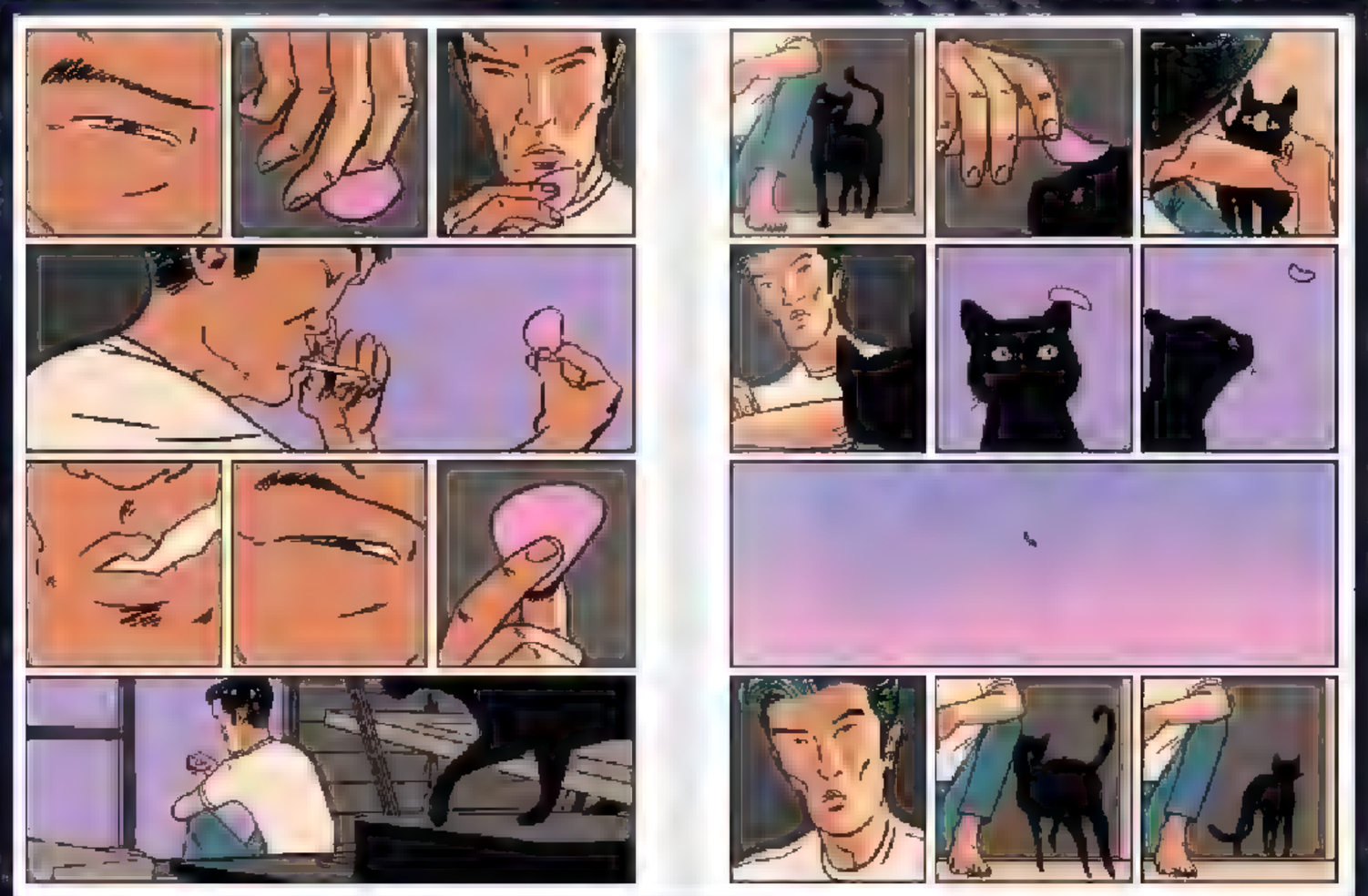
Overcome by nausea, Culbard was transported back to a traumatic childhood memory. "In the moment of my collapse, I blinked and the carriage was empty," he continues. "Stood at the far end was what looked like a captain from World War I. When I was little, I used to have a recurring dream/nightmare of being a captain in the First World War and having my guts blasted out by a shell. My brain must have been digging deep through my dream vaults for anything I'd associate with horrendous abdominal pain. After that, I distinctly remember the sound of screeching train wheels and him looking at me. I then came to on the platform as someone had helped me off the train. I could feel the cold sweat of having passed out so I deduced I'd been there for a while. I have no idea what happened to me but this momentary hallucination was my brain's way of saying, 'Sorry about this, but here's an idea for a story by way of compensation.'"

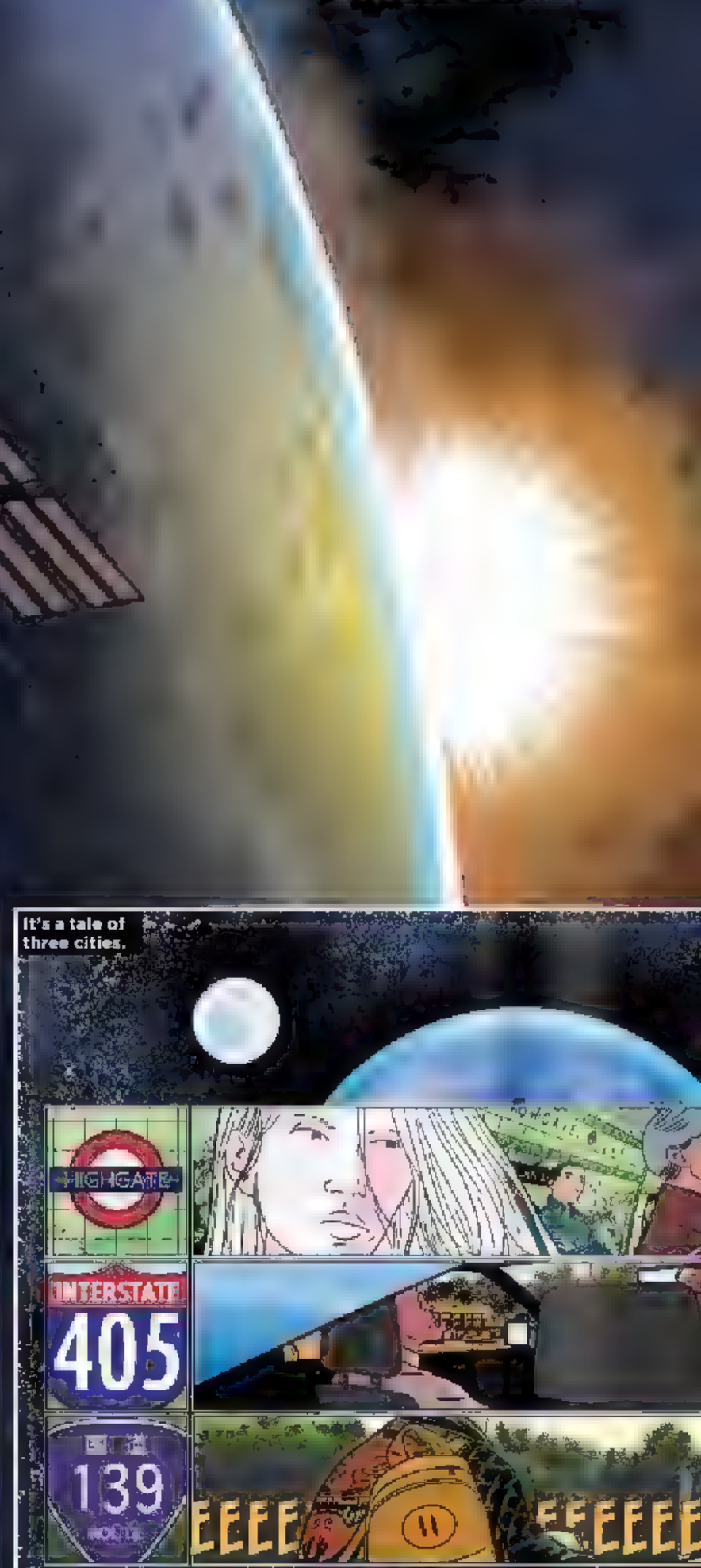
THREE-IN-ONE

From there, Culbard has weaved the tale of a very personal apocalypse, which has more in common with the experimental oeuvre of European comics masters such as Moebius than it does with more conventional armageddon scenarios. "Essentially, you have the removal of society and the influence of those around us on the choices we make, which to some might be seen as the end of the world or, as one of the characters in the book says, it could be the beginning of a new one," he says. The narrative is divided into three interlinking storylines. "The story set in Los Angeles is the story of the mind, the story set in London is the story of the body and the story set in the Aokigahara forest in Japan is the story of the soul. So you have a mystery, a love story and a quest."

Initially Culbard intended to concentrate solely on the London romance between Lilly and a male protagonist called Aaron before opting to change







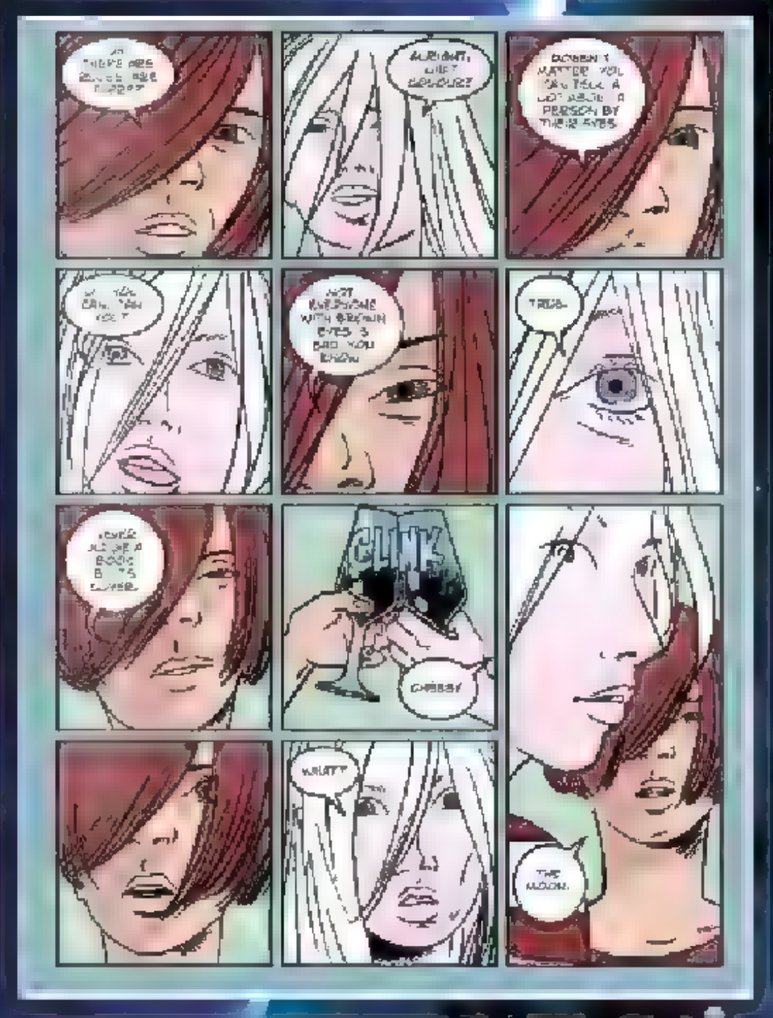
the latter's gender, although not their name. "Once I got into the idea, I decided that I wanted to say more than I could with just Lilly," he reasons. "I also wanted to show it as a global phenomenon and not just an event that has affected one city. And a lot of the things they talk about actually come directly from my own experiences including Lilly flooding her fears in the reptile house and Aaron's story about swimming too far out off the coast of Daytona and getting lost in the sea."

Celeste gets its title in part from the French word for celestial, but also alludes to the infamous 19th century French sailing ship which was inexplicably found abandoned. "It refers to how the moon figures in relation to the Earth throughout the story," he explains. "There's also this thing called the Overview Effect that I'd read about: astronauts who go into space who look back on Earth and experience a cognitive shift."

Beginning and ending with a bravura outer space sequence that eventually zooms in on a lone floating cherry blossom, Culbard deftly blends cinematic techniques with the distinct visual language of comic books. "All that stuff is informed by film," he admits. "I've always loved the way Luc Besson's movies open with a forward tracking shot, whether that's running along rain-drenched streets with a group of punks dragging a body, over the waters towards Manhattan or through an asteroid field. It's such a great way to take someone into a story."

Culbard purposely keeps any exposition to a minimum, meaning that the plot unfolds almost »

"My brain must have been digging through my dream vaults for anything I'd associate with abdominal pain"



> **“I really wanted to convey the space that an empty world would suddenly have”**

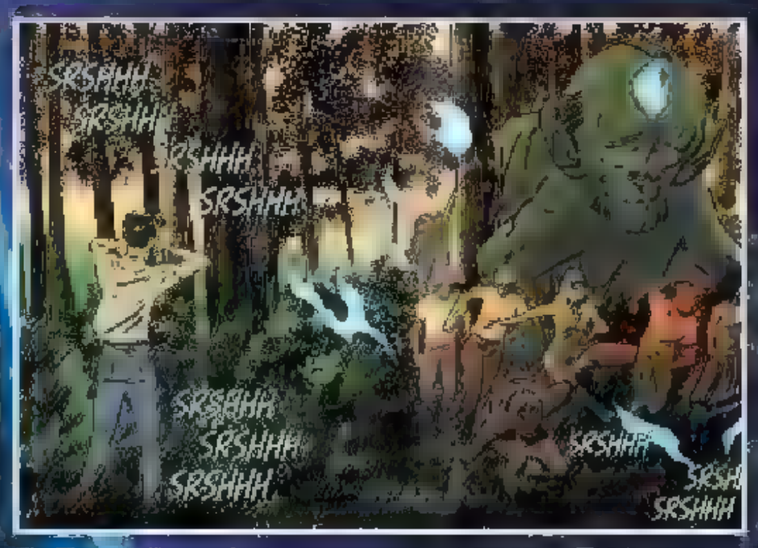
entirely through the pictures. “As I was experimenting with layouts, I found myself using these little square panels to tell the story which allowed for more acting than talking,” he explains. “The dialogue was always being stripped because I really wanted to convey the space that an empty world would suddenly have.”

GOING IT ALONE

Having previously teamed up with Dan Abnett on Vertigo series *The New Deadwardians* and with Ian Edginton on *2000 AD*’s *Brass Sun* and numerous SelfMadeHero publications, such as their version of Sherlock Holmes adventure *The Sign Of Four*, Culbard insists that he doesn’t drastically alter his working methods for his solo ventures. “Because the script has to be written before I start drawing, there’s not really a great deal of difference other than the obvious matter of it being me who has to write it,” he reasons. “So I write the script and then I take a little time off and do something else. That way I can come back to it with fresh eyes as ‘the artist’ and get to work, looking to tell the story with a second voice. But I guess the main difference when I’m writing for myself is that I leave the ‘artist me’ a ton of stuff to play with. I don’t designate panels all the time and I don’t try to over-visualise action scenes. I literally send myself ‘they fight’ notes and leave that to the ‘artist me’ to figure out, unless of course I have a very specific idea of how I want that to play out.”

Along with IDW repackaging the first two series into a six-issue miniseries for the US market, *Brass Sun* – Culbard’s quirky collaboration with Ian Edginton – returns for a third outing in the pages of *2000 AD* in May. “I love that universe,” he says of *Brass Sun*’s esoteric clockwork reality “I love getting Ian’s scripts because they’re bonkers and always exciting to read. It’s very much a combination of both our visions, and simply because of that it’s become much more science fantasy than steampunk.”

Having previously turned the likes of *At The Mountains Of Madness* and *The Shadow Out Of Time* into graphic novels for SelfMadeHero, Culbard is currently working on a comics version of another haunting HP Lovecraft tale in the form of *The Dream-Quest Of Unknown Kadath*. “I do love adapting books,” he says. “There’s a huge catalogue of works I’d dearly love to adapt, just as there are ideas for books I’d like to write myself, but there are only so many I can do a year. I’ve got a second book to adapt after this and I also have an idea for another original story, which I’m quite fired up about, so we shall see.”



Celeste is out now through SelfMadeHero. ***Brass Sun*** *is published by IDW on May 28 and* ***Brass Sun 3*** *begins in* ***2000 AD*** *in May.*

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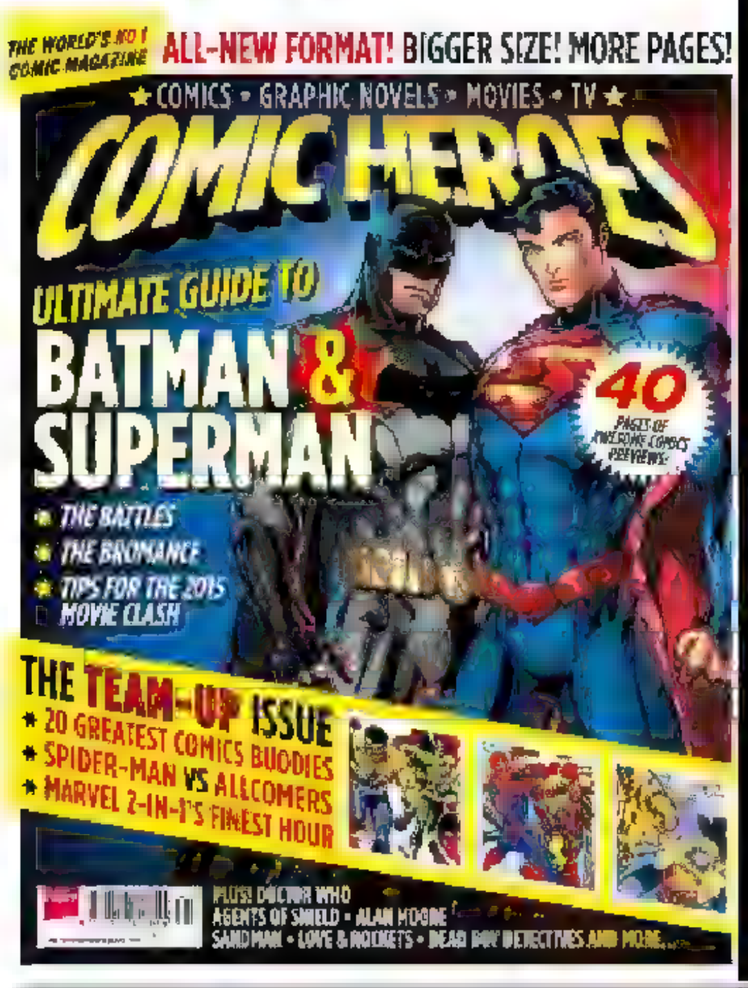
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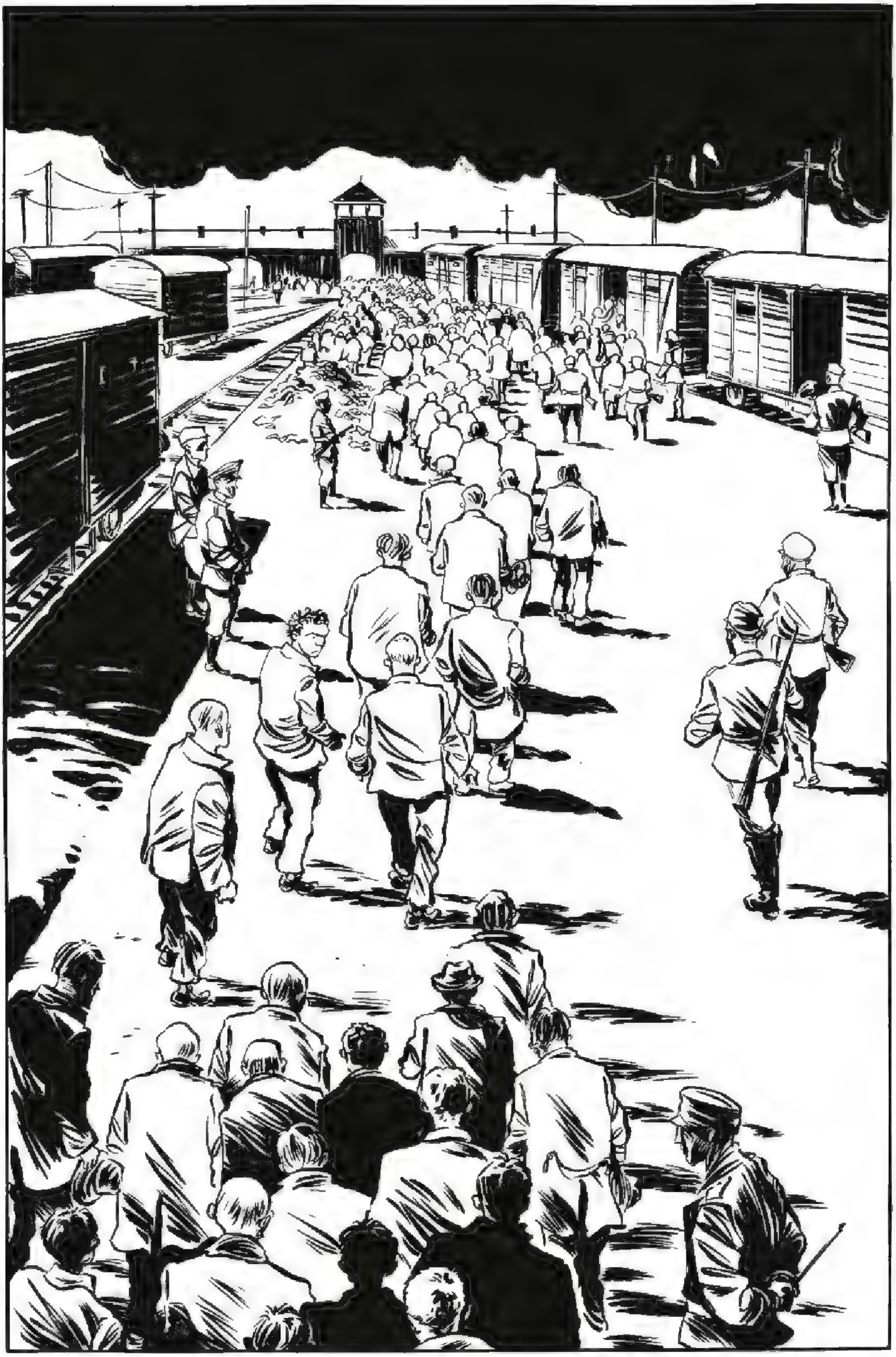


LIFE DRAWING

Reinhard Kleist is a graphic novelist with an uncommon speciality: he writes biographies. He tells Paul Gravett why his latest subject is a Jewish boxer who survived the holocaust

From American music legend Johnny Cash and Communist Cuban leader Fidel Castro to Polish Jewish boxer and Holocaust survivor Harry Haft, Reinhard Kleist writes and draws compelling graphic biographies which reveal the secrets of extraordinary 20th century lives. For the launch of *The Boxer*, his latest book translated into English by SelfMadeHero, the German artist came from Berlin to the Goethe Institut in London and shared his fascination with documenting complex personalities.

Comic Heroes: *Johnny Cash: I See A Darkness* was your first biographical graphic novel in 2006. Were you already a fan?
Reinhard Kleist: "I became a fan after I started to research the book. Before, I thought he was cool, but a bit old-fashioned. Afterwards, I discovered he was such an amazing storyteller with his music, and that his life was so dramatic and exciting. If you listen closely, you find a lot of his life in his music and you feel the passion that comes from his heart."

CH: Were you tempted to play down the controversial aspects of Cash's life?
RK: "No, I think all of that belongs to what makes his music so unique. He wasn't very kind to himself in his autobiography; he was very honest – something you can also say about his music. As well as Cash's autobiography, I used a lot of books, especially *The Beast In Me* by Franz Dobler, one of the best books about Cash. I also watched a lot of documentaries as I wanted to know how he moves and speaks. The film *The Man, His World And His Music* from the '60s, is an amazingly good documentary – no commentary, just the camera watching him. I also had to write dialogue and I made up scenes, but I did that in a style that I thought suits the characters. I want to give the reader some facts, but create an atmosphere as well, to feel what Cash was going through."

CH: How can the soundless medium of comics represent music convincingly?
RK: "A comic for me is something between a book and a movie and it can do all the good things in both media. If it is well done, you can even hear the sound of the music. My approach for the Cash book was to tell some of his songs as short stories. I also drew a large section based on his concert in Folsom Prison. The audience were long-term criminals and the atmosphere was very tense."

Opposite page: *The Boxer* is an extraordinary story about courage, love and surviving against all the odds

CH: Fidel Castro was your next subject – what was his appeal?
RK: "In 2008, I was asked by my German publisher Carlsen to do a travel book about any country I like. As there had been reports of Castro's resignation, I chose Cuba and spent a month there. I had strong, romanticised images of Cuba in my head but I wanted to find out what lies behind them. Is Cuba really like Buena Vista Social Club? Is the revolution really doing any good for the people or have the ideas been corrupted?"

CH: So your travelogue led to the idea to make a biography of Castro?
RK: "Yes, I wanted to show how he became the person behind the beard, wearing this olive green uniform. The problem is how to show him when he is 14 years old. There were not many photos but there was one when he was hunting with his dog. The distinguishing feature is his long nose, directly from the forehead – it's like a Greek statue. He was always a rebel. When he was 12 he wanted to start an uprising of the workers at his father's farm. That continued throughout his career. At university in Havana, he showed his future political career, he was very clever at using people to become what he »

EVERLAST
YOUR ACCENT SOUNDS POLISH.
I'M FROM BEŁCHATOW. I WAS IN A CAMP.
OH, THEN YOU KEEP SOMETHING VERY SPECIAL.
I HAD ALL THE GEAR I NEEDED MADE AVAILABLE TO ME AS A PROFESSIONAL BOXER.
AND THAT STAR FILLED ME WITH MORE PRIDE THAN ANY BRONZE TROPHY...

wants. People followed him because he had such a presence."

CH: You show the corruption of the Cuban regime and why there was a need for revolution...
RK: "Yes, Cuba has always been a battleground for big forces. Castro was the first to give back the Cuban people their pride. That is one big reason why the people still love him so much."

CH: Why did you bring in a narrator?
RK: "Karl is like an alter ego. I wanted to show what was going on during the revolution, rather than showing Castro all the time. So when he signs a law, I want to show what happens in the food store. I couldn't have a narrator who is Cuban, because I'm a foreigner. So I chose this young German journalist, who arrives in 1958 full of naive enthusiasm. He sees the triumph of the revolution and decides to stay and see what's going on. What usually happens with revolutions is that once the revolutionaries have to take power, the whole thing gets corrupted. A lot of people resigned and criticised Castro and his followers. My character goes through this phase too, but he stays and stands behind his ideals."

CH: How do you translate iconic moments in history into comics form?
RK: "I want to show how these idealised images are born. I open with the story behind Alberto Korda's famous photo of Che Guevara. Che appeared for only a few seconds, and Korda took just two shots. I also had a photo of the invasion of the Bay Of Pigs but I was more interested in what happened afterwards. I based it on a Cuban documentary, which shows Castro getting angry. He has a very expressive face when he's making speeches."

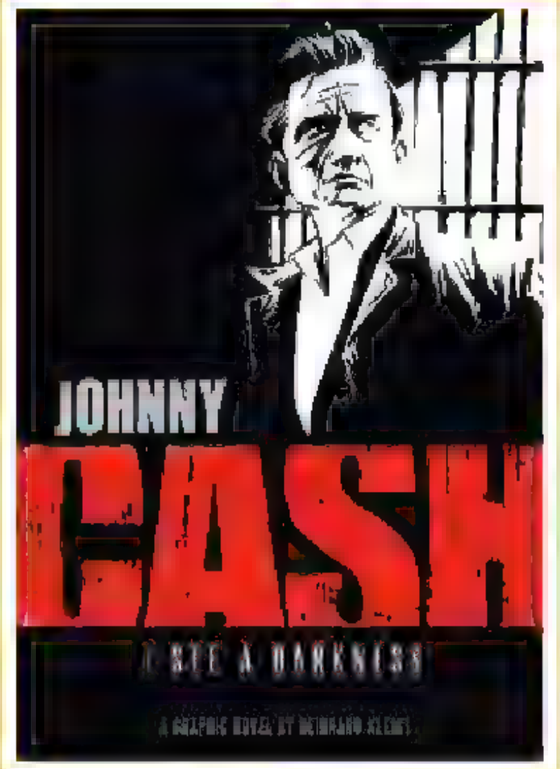
CH: How long did the Castro book take?
RK: "It took me some months to write the story down, and the drawing and inking took almost a year. Which was quite quick for 300 pages – almost a page a day. I had to be quick because I had a tight deadline. I didn't know that the book would get bigger and bigger!"

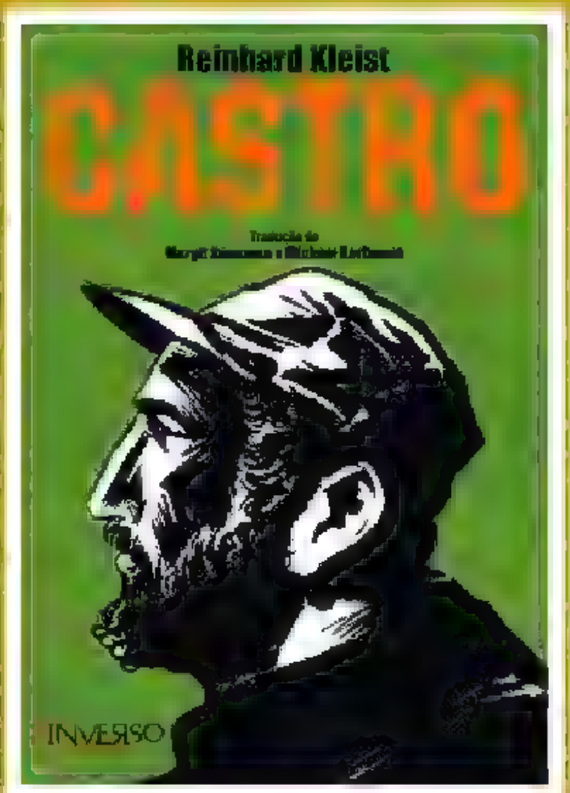
CH: Is Castro aware of your books?
RK: "There was a man who came to get the Castro book signed in Munich and he asked me to sign it to 'Fidel'. He said he has contacts and could get a copy to him. So I had to make a drawing for Castro, my hands were really shaking! After my signature, I just wrote, 'para Fidel'."

Above: Harry Haft fought his way out of the concentration camps and into a r ng with Rocky Marc ano

CH: What sparked your interest in the Jewish boxer Harry Haft?
RK: "I discovered the German edition of his biography, written by his eldest son Alan Scott Haft, when I was researching illustrations of the Holocaust for a newspaper. At first I didn't want to do it, because Harry is not a very likeable person and because it's divided into two parts: first his survival of the concentration camps and then secondly his boxing career in America. But I found the connection between these two parts, the love story between Harry and Leah, teenage sweethearts separated by the war."

CH: Harry Haft died in 2007. How much help did you get from his son, Alan?
RK: "We had a very intense exchange of emails and he sent me photos of a tour he made in Poland and across Europe following his father's footsteps. He also sent me a package full of amazing original photos. There's no photo of Harry – or Hertzko in Polish – from before the war when he was kid. The earliest photos are from 1948. So I had to work out how to show him younger. I tried depicting him with this boxer's nose but he didn't have that as a child! I needed a simple scheme





“Harry fought other prisoners knowing the loser would die in the gas chambers”

of his face so you recognise him in every panel. He had lots of curly hair but that was shaved off in the camp, so his nose becomes an identifier. The line of his eyebrows became the feature that makes him recognisable, it shows his energetic and determined character.”

CH: Did you believe everything Harry said about himself?
RK: “Not entirely. For 50 years Harry didn’t say a word to anybody and during this time memories change and he probably embroidered his story to paint himself in a better light. I doubted that a Mafia threat lay behind him losing his fight with Rocky Marciano. I thought this guy who threatened him – Harry called him Frank Palermo – was too Mafioso to be true. But I found out he was real and he looked even better in reality. His nickname was Blinky Palermo and there are stories that Marciano’s entourage were fixing matches.”

CH: How did Harry start boxing in the concentration camps?
RK: “An SS officer picked him as a boxer to entertain his fellow Nazis. Harry fought against other prisoners, knowing the loser would die in the gas chamber but he wanted to survive and to protect his brother. Harry was called the ‘Fat Jew’ by other prisoners, because he was given enough to eat.”

CH: What drives Harry to leave Germany for America?
RK: “He finds out that Leah moved there. Unable to trace her, he decides to train for the first time as a professional boxer to get his name in the newspapers so that Leah would contact him. As a Jewish sportsman, he fights with the Star of David sewn on his shorts. His last fight against the champion Rocky Marciano was out of his league but he hoped Leah would hear about it. Harry described how during his bouts he had flashbacks to his fights in the camps, which I show through subjective images of the SS officers’ dogs and his victims.”

CH: Who will be your next subject?
RK: “I am writing about Samia Yusuf Omar, a Somali sportswoman. She ran the slowest ever Olympics 200-metre sprint in Beijing. She was thin, in a baggy t-shirt, and when she came last, she got the biggest applause. Samia wanted to compete in the London Olympics, but war and corruption in her homeland prevented her training. She tried to reach Italy to train, but died on a boat crossing the Mediterranean. I really admire that she had such a strong will to follow her dream. Right now I’m preparing a biography of Nick Cave. We met last year and he likes the idea. It’s interesting to have his input – he has completely different ideas.”

Above: Strong subjects the Man In Black and The Man In Green Army Fat gUes

***Castro** and **Cash: I See A Darkness** are out now; **The Boxer: The True Story of Holocaust Survivor Harry Haft** is out on 29 April.*

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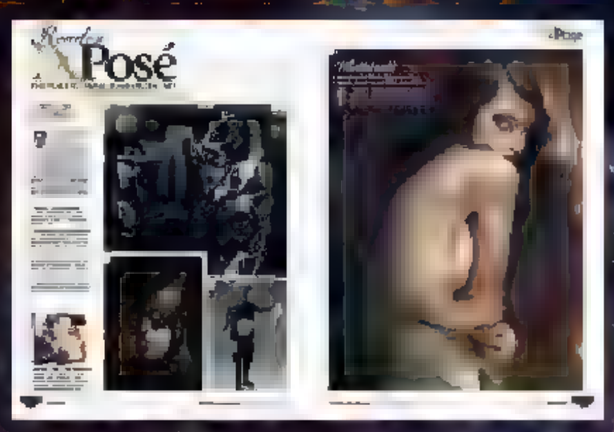

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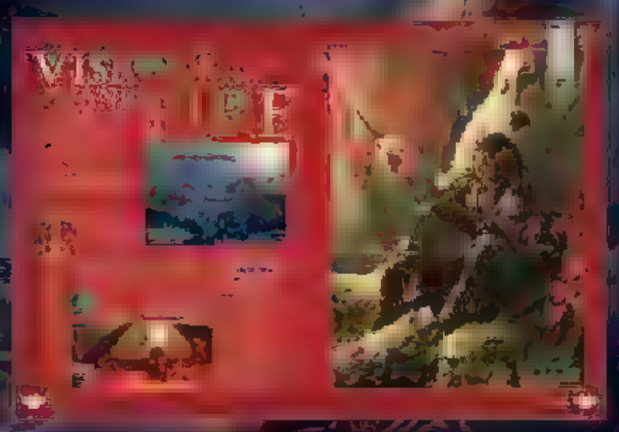

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SUBLIME FRENCH SATIRE

Plus THE SMASHER LIVES AGAIN!

LAPTOP GUY

ARE YOU READY FOR A "SIT-COMIC?"

Weapons Of Mass Diplomacy

Writer: Abel Lanzac

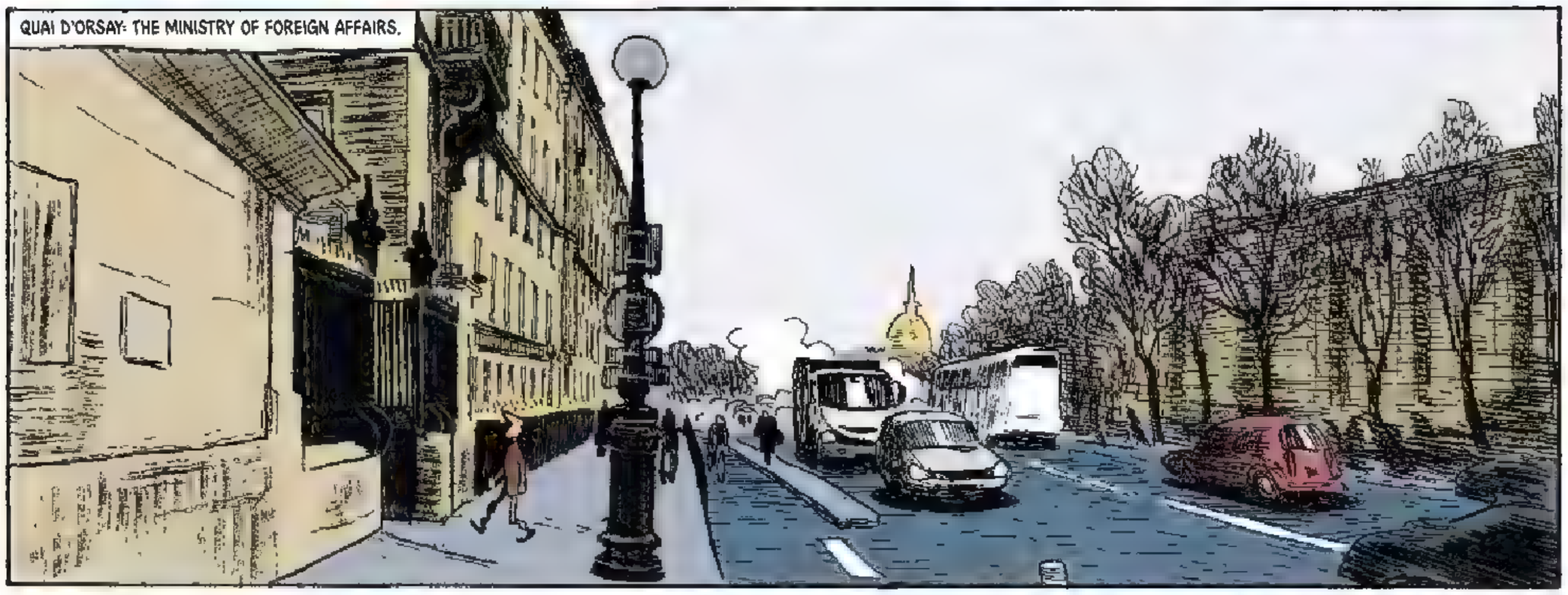
Artist: Christophe Blain

This award-winning political satire follows the French Foreign Minister Alexandre Taillard de Vorms during the build-up to the Iraq War. De Vorms is an intellectual fond of quoting classical poetry in public, while entertaining the political movers and shakers of the day behind closed doors, and if he bears more than a passing resemblance to former French PM and Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin, who Lanzac used to write speeches for... well, the authors couldn't possibly comment...

On sale now from SelfMadeHero

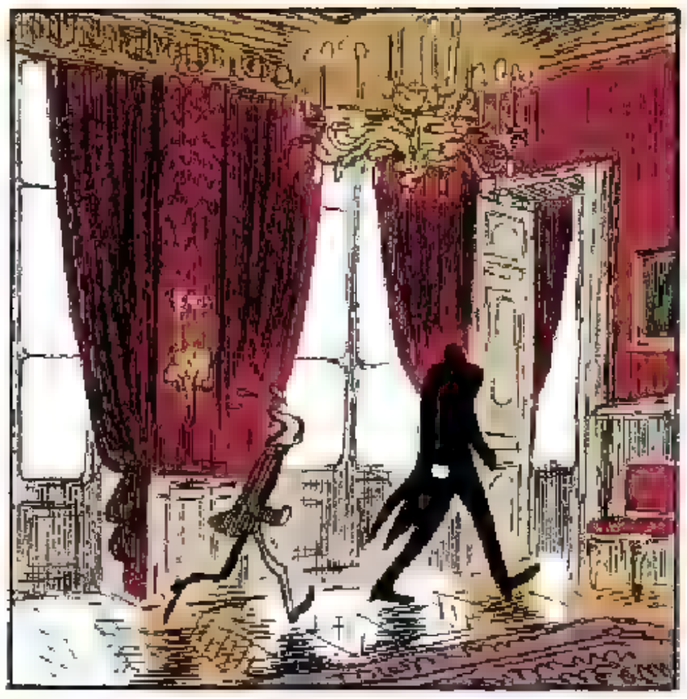
All pages © SelfMadeHero

CHAPTER 1: "I WENT IN SEARCH OF MYSELF." ~ HERACLITUS, 6TH CENTURY B.C.

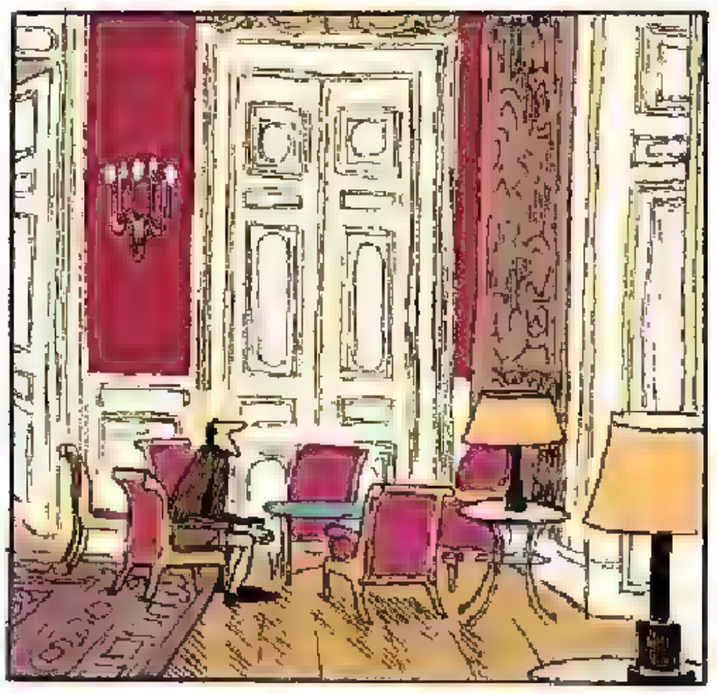


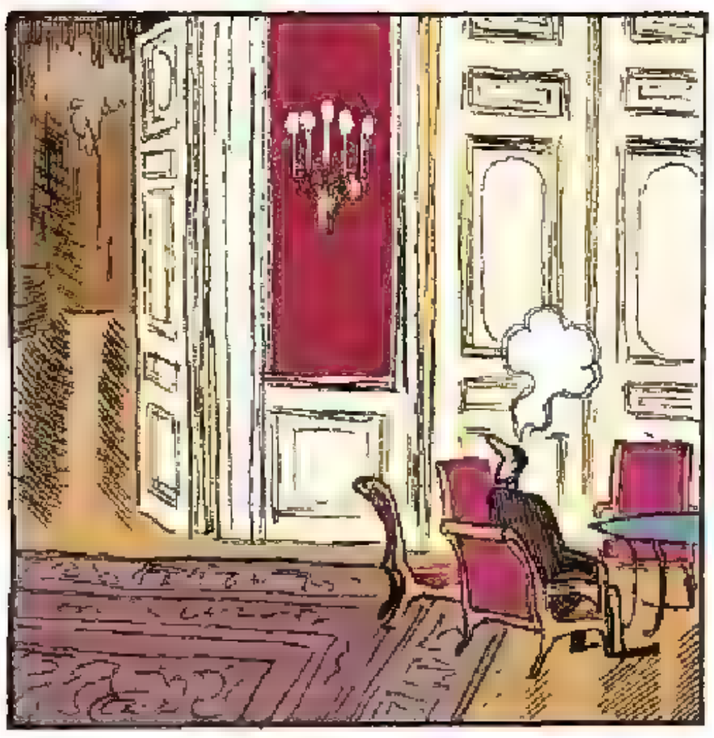
I HAVE AN APPOINTMENT WITH ALEXANDRE TAILLARD DE VORMS...
THE, UH, MINISTER.
MY NAME'S ARTHUR VLAMINCK.

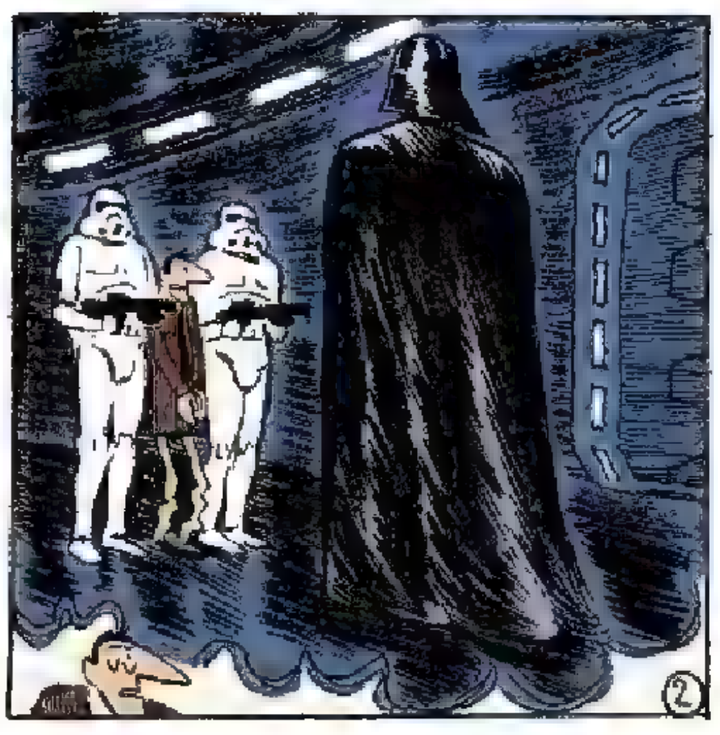
THIS WAY, PLEASE.



I HAVE AN APPOINTMENT WITH THE MINISTER.
MY NAME'S ARTHUR VLAMINCK.



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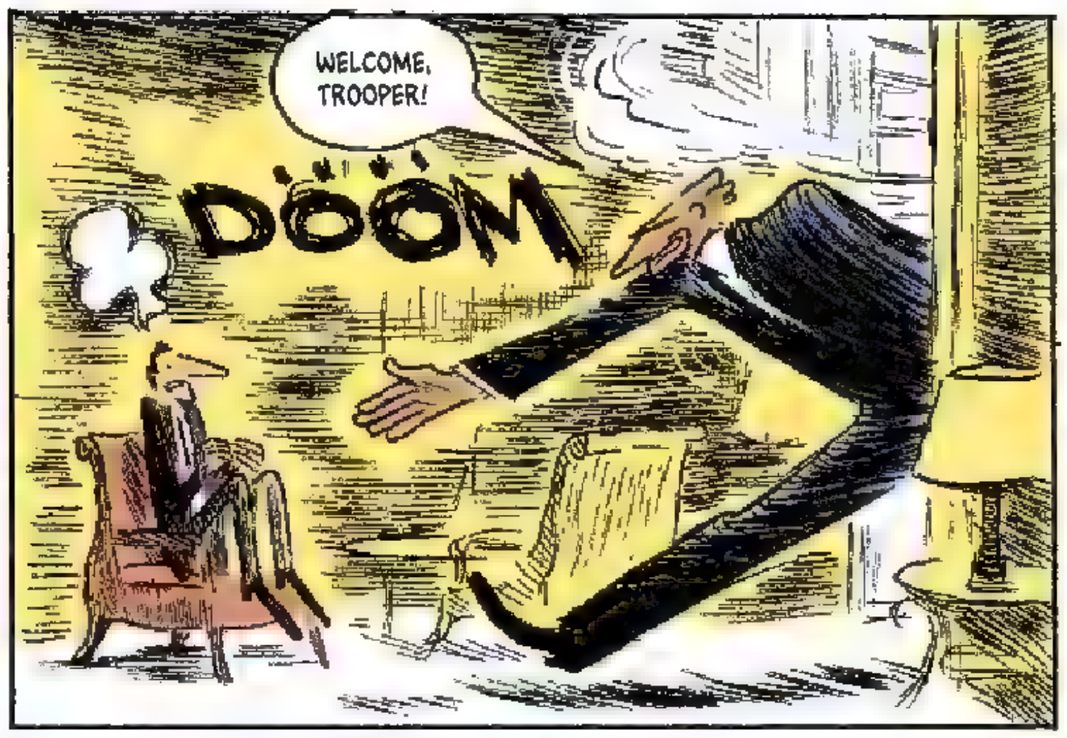
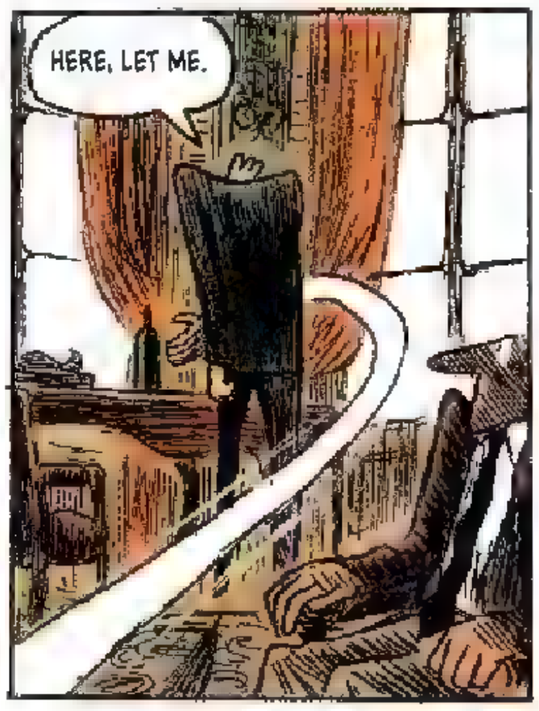

WELCOME, TROOPER!
DOOM

ARTHUR, YOU'RE A MAN OF MYSTERY. WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN HIDING?
A HUT IN THE WOODS?
A DESERT PUEBLO?
MR. MINISTER SIR...

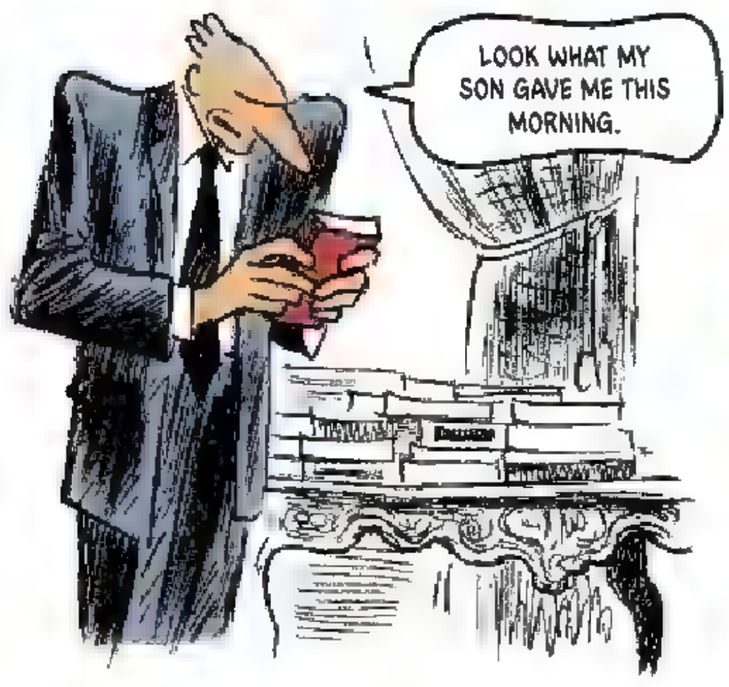
SO! LIFE TREATING YOU WELL THESE DAYS?
DONE WITH THAT DISSERTATION?
WHAT WAS IT ON AGAIN?
IT WAS... I MEAN... NO... NOT YET...

WHAT'S YOUR POISON, ARTHUR?
A WEE SIP OF WINE?
YES... I SIR...

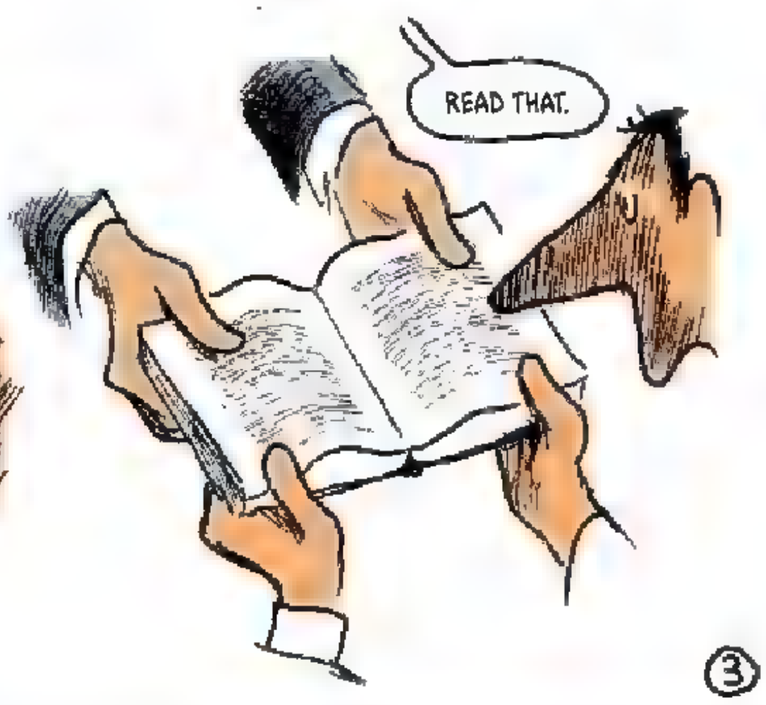

HERE, LET ME.

THANK YOU, SIR...

HERE!
YOU LIKE BOOKS, RIGHT?


LOOK WHAT MY SON GAVE ME THIS MORNING.

CAREFUL, IT'S A FIRST EDITION.
MARX
PHILOSOPHIC MANUSCRIPTS
YOUR HANDS CLEAN?


READ THAT.

SEE IT?
NO.
RIGHT THERE.

"THE PHILOSOPHERS HAVE ONLY INTERPRETED THE WORLD, IN VARIOUS WAYS. THE POINT, HOWEVER, IS TO CHANGE IT."
OH RIGHT, YES.

I NEED A TEAM, ARTHUR.
A CRACK SQUAD.

FIRST RESPONDERS.
ALWAYS ON THE MOVE.
24/7.
A CRACK SQUAD.

THE BALANCE OF POWER THE WORLD HAS KNOWN FOR THE LAST 50 YEARS IS NO MORE.
9/11 MADE THE AMERICANS AWARE OF BOTH THEIR POWER AND THEIR WEAKNESS.

EVEN AS WE SPEAK, NEOCONS ARE REDEFINING STRATEGIC DOCTRINE AROUND "SECURITY".
THE DOCTRINE OF PREVENTIVE WAR.

THERE IS A NEW VOLCANO IN THE WORLD TODAY, ARTHUR. SURELY YOU'VE HEARD.

A VOLCANO ABOUT TO ERUPT!

AND THE AMERICANS WANT TO FIGHT FIRE WITH FIRE! UNILATERALLY FANNING THE FLAMES! SOON THEY'LL BE BLINDED BY THEIR OWN SMOKE!

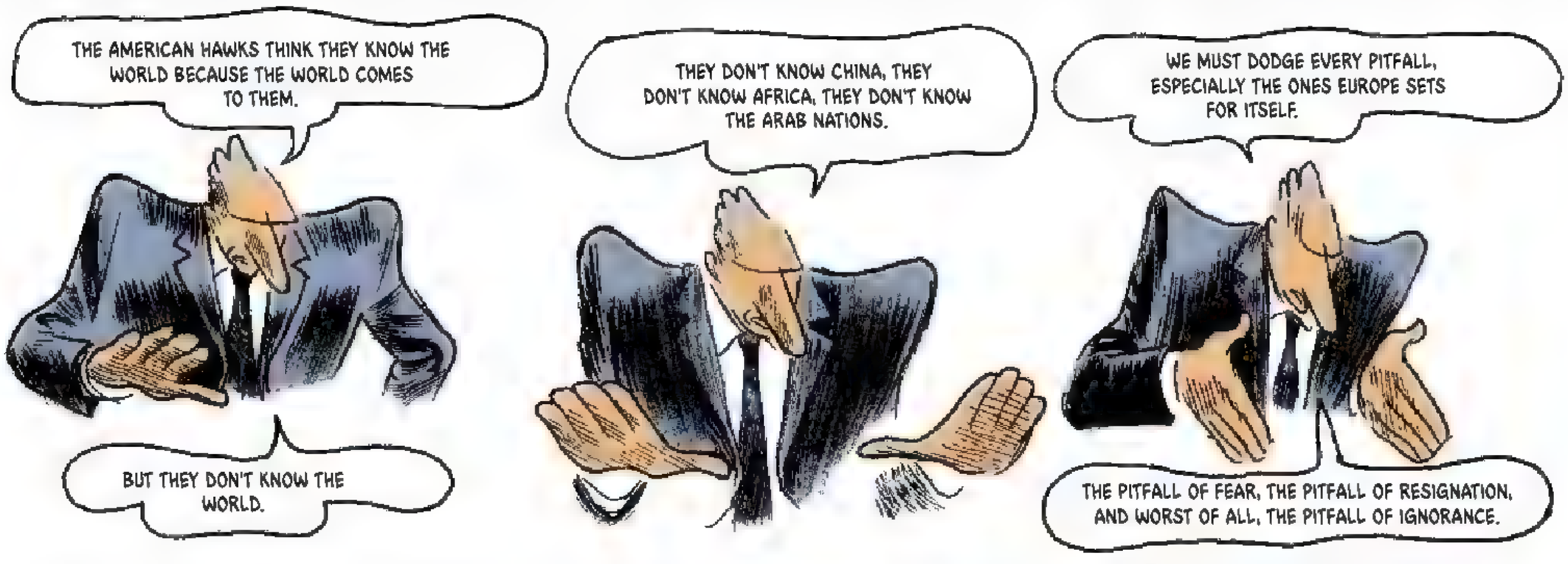
BUT IT'S NOT JUST THEIR VOLCANO. TODAY, ARTHUR, YOUR VOLCANO IS MY VOLCANO. IT'S OUR VOLCANO. IT'S EVERYONE'S VOLCANO.

THE NAME OF THIS VOLCANO, ARTHUR, IS THE KINGDOM OF KHEMED. ALL EYES ARE ON IT.
AMERICA'S PLANS FOR THIS VOLCANO THREATEN THE REST OF THE WORLD.
THE FATE OF THIS VOLCANO WILL AFFECT ALL VOLCANOES TO COME.

FOR WE STAND ON THE BRINK OF ERUPTION, ARTHUR — ON THE BRINK OF WORLD WAR III!

4

WEAPONS OF MASS DIPLOMACY


THE AMERICAN HAWKS THINK THEY KNOW THE WORLD BECAUSE THE WORLD COMES TO THEM.
BUT THEY DON'T KNOW THE WORLD.
THEY DON'T KNOW CHINA, THEY DON'T KNOW AFRICA, THEY DON'T KNOW THE ARAB NATIONS.
WE MUST DODGE EVERY PITFALL, ESPECIALLY THE ONES EUROPE SETS FOR ITSELF.
THE PITFALL OF FEAR, THE PITFALL OF RESIGNATION, AND WORST OF ALL, THE PITFALL OF IGNORANCE.
THE U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE HAS A VERITABLE ARMY ON STAFF.
THEY HAVE INCREDIBLE RESOURCES.
THERE AREN'T EVEN A DOZEN OF US.
OURS IS A TINY SHIP.
NOT A SHIP — MORE OF A DINGHY, REALLY.
NOT EVEN A DINGHY, IN FACT — A RAFT!
BUT FOR MY RAFT, I'VE PICKED THE CREAM OF THE CROP.
YOU'RE YOUNG, BUT YOU'VE GOT A NOGGIN ON THOSE SHOULDERS.
I HAVE FAITH IN YOU.
I NEED YOU ON BOARD.
UM... I, UH, NEED TO THIN—
I'M ENTRUSTING YOU WITH THE MOST IMPORTANT PART.
THE WORD.
5

Laptop Guy

Writer: Jack Lothian

Artist: Sha Nazir

Described by its creator as *Adaptation* meets *The Office*, *Laptop Guy* follows failed artist and burger flipper Sha who pours his heart and soul into creating a comic only to see it die a commercial death; then, when he tries to move on, its title character comes to life to haunt him.

On sale now from Black Hearted Press

All pages © Sha Nazir & Jack Lothian

SO THIS IS IT. BACK TO WORK.
REMEMBER! GRUMPY CAT SAYS 'SMILE AND YOU WILL BE SMELT AT!'

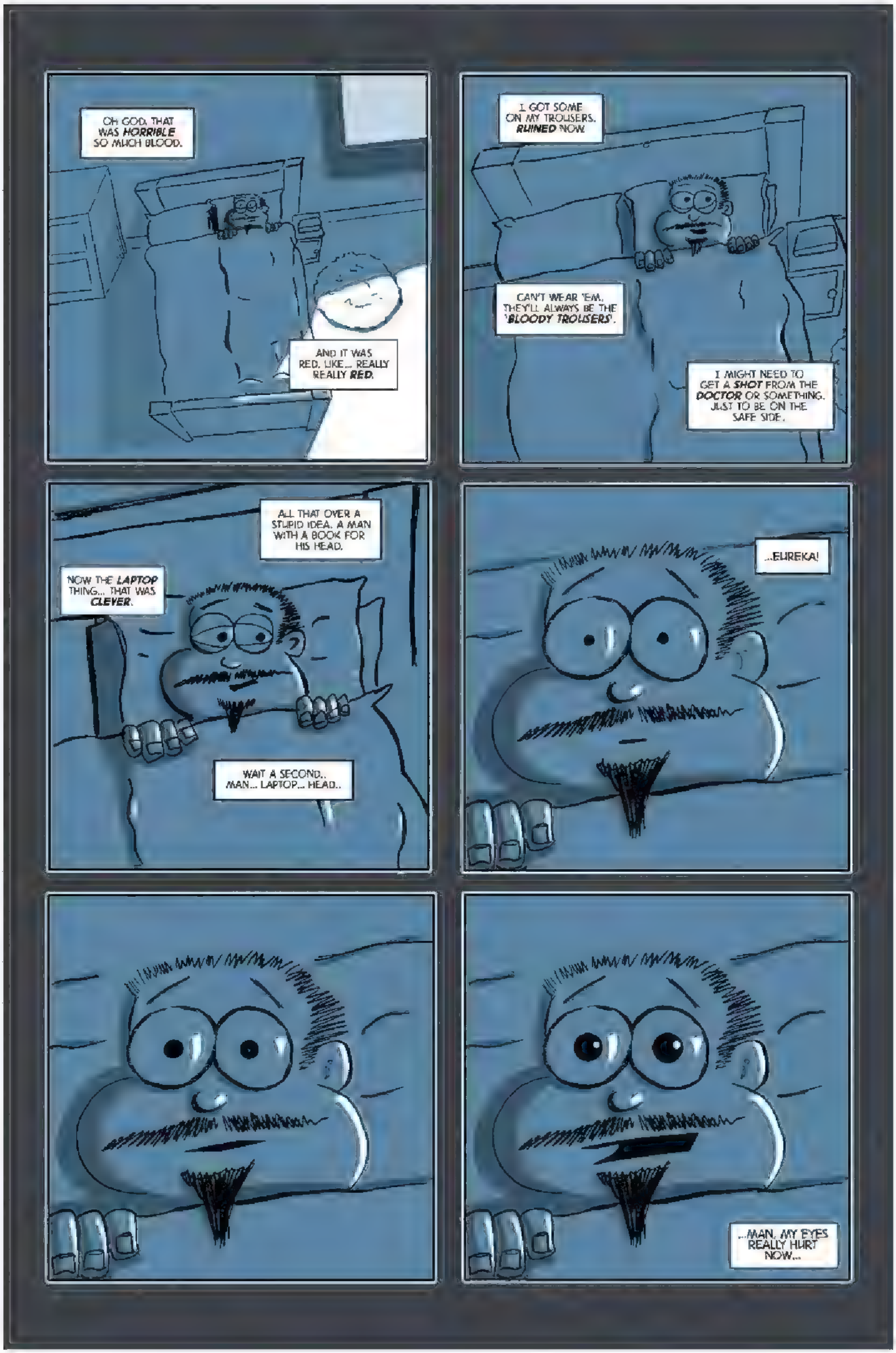
UNLESS I COME UP WITH A MULTI-MILLION POUND IDEA *RIGHT NOW.*
COME ON *BRAIN.*
THREE... TWO... ONE...

I HATE MY LIFE.

HEY RAUL. HOW'S IT GOING?
NOT SO WELL. TODAY I FINISHED MY NOVEL.
THAT'S GREAT NEWS.
NO. IT IS SHIT. SIX HUNDRED AND FORTY PAGES OF SHIT.
SURE IT'S NOT THAT BAD.

IT WAS ABOUT A MAN WHO WAKES UP ONE MORNING AND HIS HEAD IS A BOOK. A BOOK THAT EVERYBODY ELSE CAN READ, BUT HE CANNOT.
HE MEETS A BLIND GIRL WHO CANNOT READ IT EITHER AS SHE HAS NO EYES. THEY FALL IN LOVE.
BUT BEFORE THEY CAN BE MARRIED, SHE IS RUN OVER BY A MOBILE LIBRARY. HE SITS ALONE IN THE RAIN BY HER GRAVESTONE. THE BOOK GETS WET. THE END. THE END OF RAUL'S GREAT BOOK OF SHIT.
MAYBE YOU JUST NEED TO, UH... Y'KNOW... UPDATE IT A BIT.
INSTEAD OF WAKING UP WITH A BOOK FOR A HEAD... MAYBE HE HAS A COMPUTER OR SOMETHING...

HA HA HA! A MAN WITH A LAPTOP FOR A HEAD! YOU HAVE A LOVELY IMAGINATION, MR. SHA.
AND NOW I MUST INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENT MYSELF.
...WHAT?


OH GOD, THAT WAS *HORRIBLE* SO MUCH BLOOD.
AND IT WAS RED. LIKE... REALLY REALLY *RED*.
I GOT SOME ON MY TROUSERS. *RUINED* NOW.
CAN'T WEAR 'EM. THEY'LL ALWAYS BE THE '*BLOODY TROUSERS*'.
I MIGHT NEED TO GET A *SHOT* FROM THE *DOCTOR* OR SOMETHING. JUST TO BE ON THE SAFE SIDE.
ALL THAT OVER A STUPID IDEA. A MAN WITH A BOOK FOR HIS HEAD.
NOW THE *LAPTOP* THING... THAT WAS *CLEVER*.
WAIT A SECOND.. MAN... LAPTOP... HEAD..
...EUREKA!
...MAN, MY EYES REALLY HURT NOW...

Alien Legion: Uncivil War

Writer: Chuck Dixon

Artists: Carl Potts, Larry Stroman

The classic series returns, blasting its way into an all-new battle-scarred, laser-ravaged adventure! In a galaxy torn by strife, savaged by civil war, boiling with spilled blood, Alien Legion is a cosmic military force doing its damnedest to keep the peace by always being ready for war. The squad's grizzled veterans are on what should be a boring milk run, shepherding refugees fleeing a civil war. Could be a good chance to toughen the newbies into soldiers, until peacekeeping descends into full-scale war!

On sale in June

All pages © Titan

DHIZ IZZA *DHIBPLOMADIC* MIZZION, GRIMROB!

DIPLOMATIC. RIGHT, SERGEANT P'KE.

NOMAB IS NOD TO LZE DEADBLY FORCE! DHEEZ ARE *NON-COMBADANDS!*

TIL... THEY TRY'N GUT US.

THE SHIP IS PAST MAX CAPACITY FOR LIFE SUPPORT

AYAL, THERE MUST BE FIFTY THOUSAND SENTIENTS ABOARD. ANY IDEA OF THEIR SPECIES, RAX?

SSCAN PROGRAM NEEDSS AN *UPGRADE*, COLONEL. NO WAY TO NARROW THE READINGSS BEYOND A SSIMPLE HEADCOUNT

IF THEY *HAVE* HEADSS, THAT ISS

I CAN'T VERY WELL LEAVE A D STRESS SIGNAL GO UNHEEDED. BUT NEITHER DO I WANT TO FEED NOMAD INTO AN AMBUSH.

PROTOCOLS... PROTOCOLS...

ZEERA, I ONLY HAVE A MOMENT OR TWO.

I'M SURPRISED TO HEAR FROM YOU *AT ALL*, MOTHER. WHERE ARE YOU?

YOU *KNOW* I CAN'T DISCLOSE THAT.

WORTH A TRY, RIGHT?

. THEY GOTS TWO MOUTHS, RIGHT? ONE FOR EATIN' AN' ONE FOR...

IS ANYTHING WRONG?
JUST ANOTHER CYCLE IN NOMAD.
THAT BAD?
MEH.
HOW ARE YOU?
OLD TEMBERLANE AND I ARE PUTTING IN DROH MELONS WHILE HE TELLS ME STORIES OF THE ORESTAN CAMPAIGN.
ANYTHING HE SAYS ABOUT ME IS A LIE, ZEERA
ZEERA! TEMBER!
MOTHER, G'GWIN IS CALLING US IN FOR MEALTIME.
YOU'D BETTER GO, THEN.
I MISS YOU. STAY OUT OF TROUBLE.
HE SAID THE SAME ABOUT YOU.
I MISS YOU TOO.
GEAR UP! GEAR UP!

"THIS CRAFT IS THE SOURCE OF THE DISTRESS SIGNAL.

"LOOKS LIKE IT'S BEEN THROUGH HELL."

GOIN' IN *HOT*. I *HATE* GOIN' IN SODDIN' HOT.

YOU WOULDN'T HAVE IT *ANY* OTHER WAY, GRIMROD.

DOESN'T MEAN I GOT *T' LIKE* IT, TAMARA ME LOVE.

I WAS *KIPPIN'* THROUGH MOST OF THE MISSION BRIEF--

--WE'RE T' SORT THESE BASTICHS OUT WITHOUT HURTIN' 'EM?

WHY DOES IT *ALWAYS* HAVE TO BE METHANE?

:SNIF!:-

METHANE.

CONTACT FORWARD!

IDENTIFY YOURSELVES! *IDENTIFY*--

HOOP!
HUHN!
HWOOOO!
HARKS! WE WERE TOLD THEY WERE BLEEDIN' REFUGEES!
NO DEABLY FORCE! DHEY'RE UNARMED!
HARKS DON'T NEED WEAPONS! THEY ARE WEAPONS!
MASERS AT LOWEST SETTING JUST WINDS THEM UP!
WE AIN'T EVEN SLOWIN' 'EM DOWN!
UNGH!
TOO MANY THERE ARE!
UNGH!

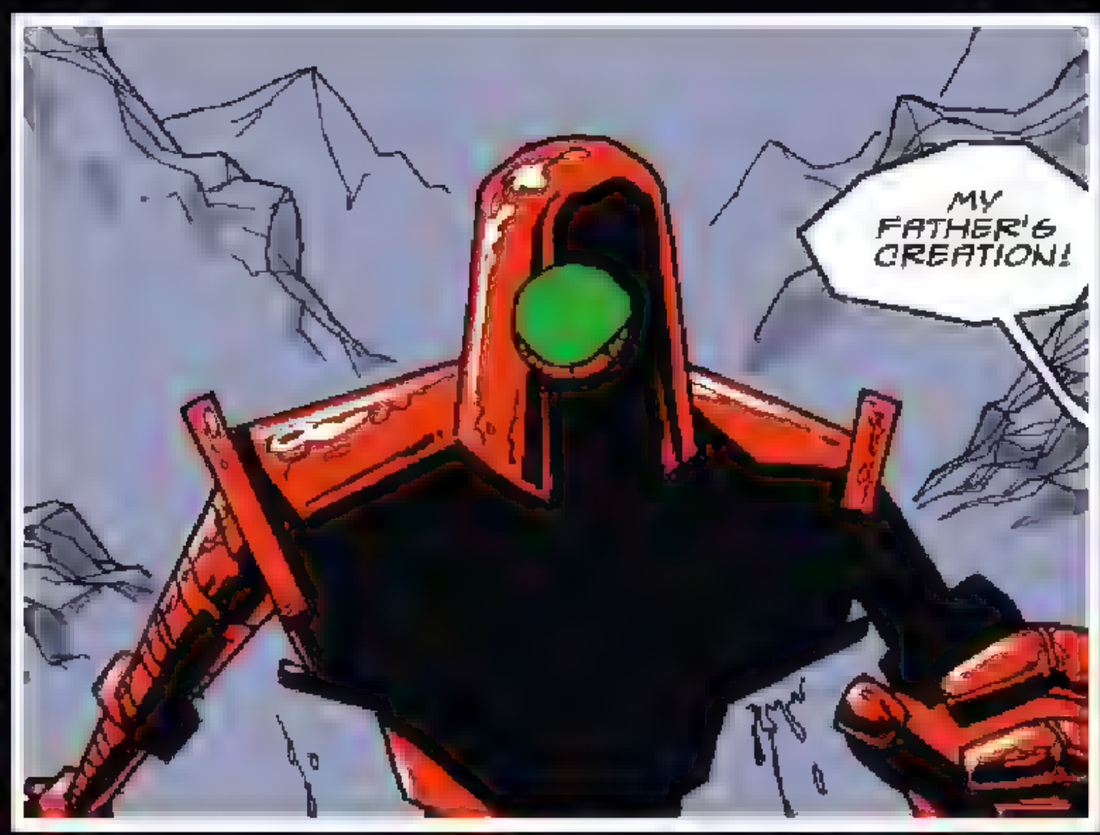
RAMMIN' BOSPOR!
STAY DOWN!
DOWN!

THEY SEND A DISTRESS CALL--
--THEN TRY AND KILL US?

NOMAB REGROUB!
KEEB DHEM OFF DE SHUBBLE!

SWEET EYE OF AYA...
IT'S AN AMBUSH.

CONTACT GENERAL SARIGAR!
I NEED A CHANGE IN ENGAGEMENT GUIDELINES INSTANTA!
NOMAD SHUTTLE NINE-NINE TO PIECEMAKER--



The Smasher

Writer: Gordon Robertson

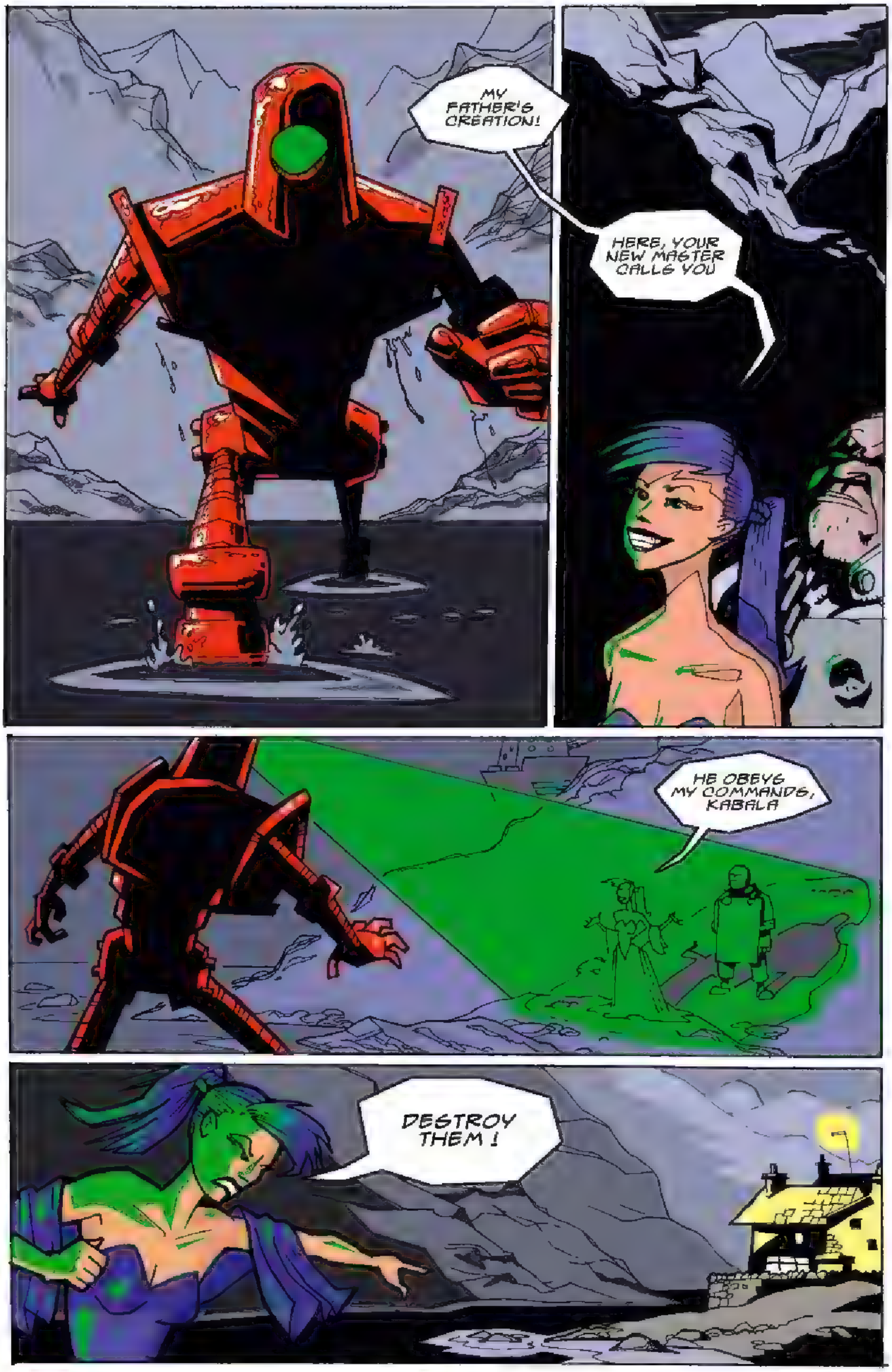
Artist: Cuttlefish

The Smasher is one of a number of long-defunct DC Thomson characters which are being resurrected by the Glasgow League Of Writers with DC Thomson's backing. At the moment the project is in its early stages and *Comic Heroes* is happy to lend its support by spreading the word. You can find more of GLOW's work every week in *Comic Review*.

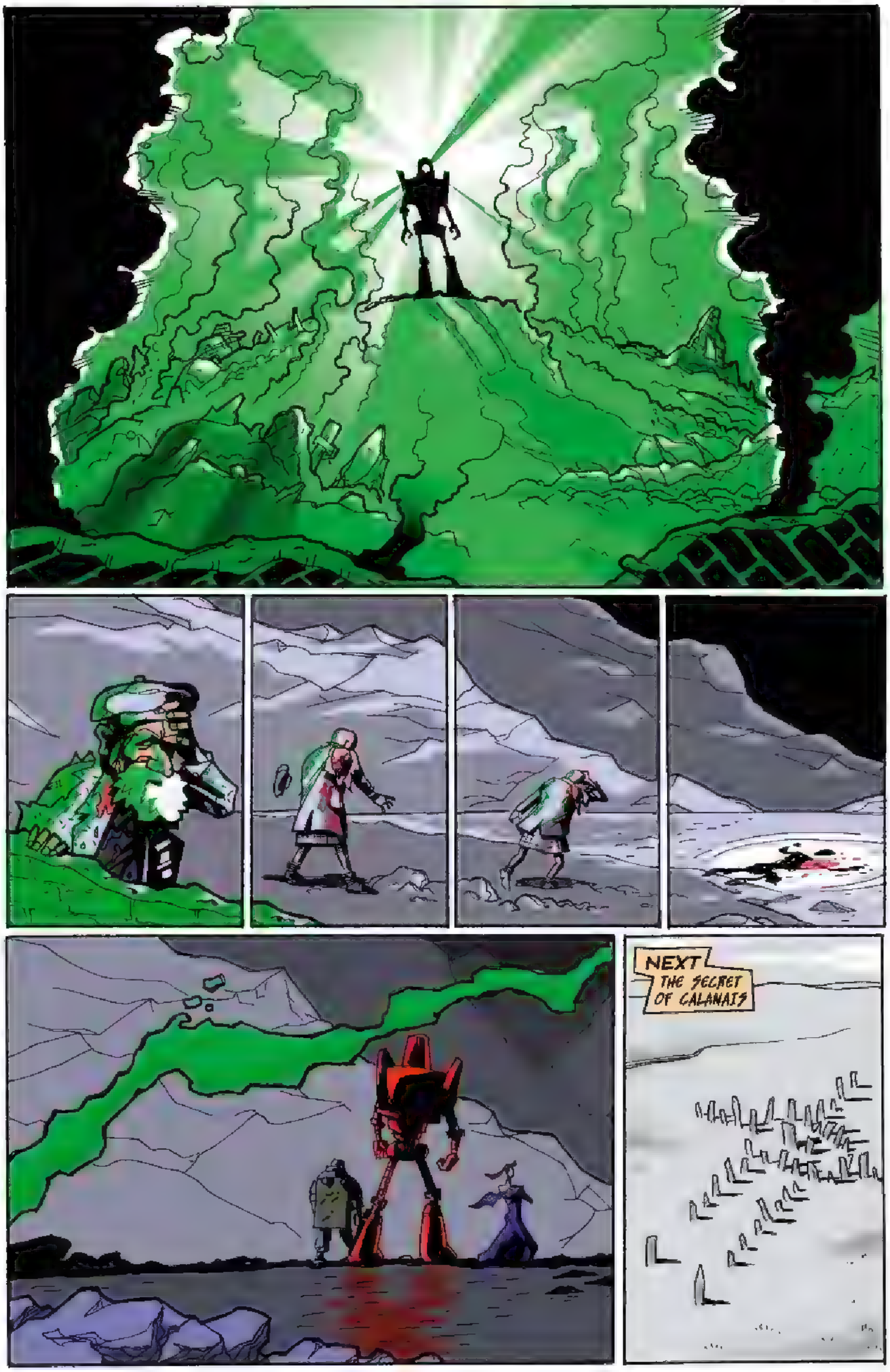
All pages © Gordon Robertson/Cuttlefish/DC Thomson

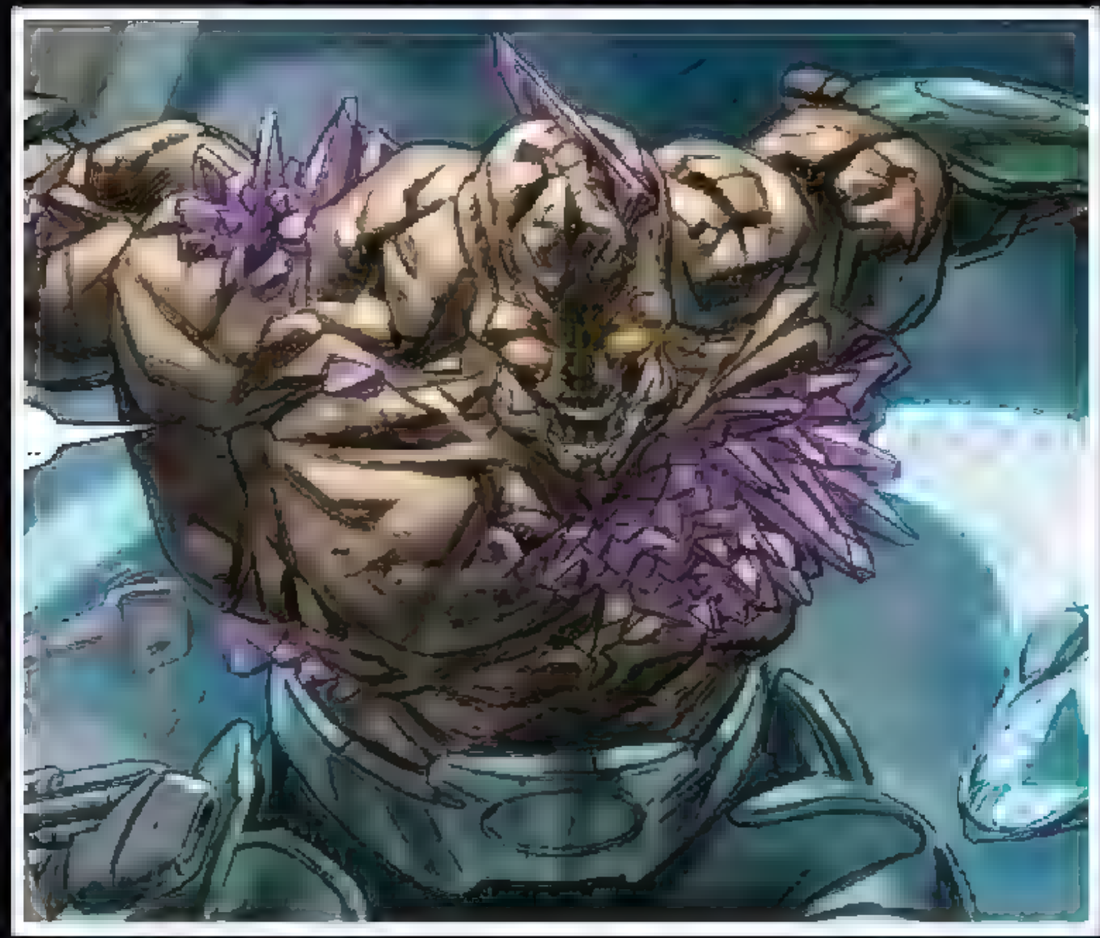
LOCH AWE, SCOTLAND
'I'M TELLING YOU...
THE DROWNED MAN
...IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT...
...WHEN THERE'S NO MOON...
...A LIGHT SHINES...
...THAT GOES ALL THE WAY TO HEAVEN ITSELF.

WE HAVE HIM KABALA.
IT'S' TIME- BRING HIM BACK!
HE'S ALIVE!
SMASHER
Story: Robertson Art: Cuttlefish


MY FATHER'S CREATION!
HERE, YOUR NEW MASTER CALLS YOU
HE OBEYS MY COMMANDS, KABALA
DESTROY THEM!

THE
DROWN
MAN
HE'S BEAUTIFUL
WE WILL HAVE REVENGE ON THOSE WHO DOUBTED MY FATHER


NEXT
THE SECRET OF CALANAIS



Armor Hunters

Writer: Robert Venditti

Artist: Doug Braithwaite

This summer, Valiant is kicking of its colossal, 18-part *Armor Hunters* crossover event. A relentless and surgical strike team from the farthest reaches of space – sworn to exterminate the X-O Manowar armour and all like it – has finally found its last target. They will hunt. They will trap. They will kill. And they will rid the universe of the X-O Manowar's incalculable destructive power... even if that means taking the Earth with it.

On sale in June

All pages © 2014 Valiant Entertainment

RUSSIA.
INSTITUTE OF APPLIED WEAPONS SCIENCE. THEORETICAL DIVISION.
UNDERGROUND BUNKER 3.
WUNNK WUNNK
<NO ANSWER FROM UPSTAIRS!>
WUNNK
<EVERYONE ELSE IS *DEAD*, CAPTAIN.>
<IS THERE ANYTHING IN THIS ROOM WE CAN USE?>
NYET.
<EVERYTHING IS STILL IN THE *TESTING* PHASE. THESE WEAPONS MAY NOT EVEN BE *OPERATIONAL*.>
WUNNK
<THEN *WHY* ARE WE *PROTECTING* THEM?>
<BECAUSE OUR ORDERS SAY TO. AND BECAUSE WE ARE *SPETSNAZ*.>
<"ANY *MISSION*, ANY *TIME*, ANY *PLACE*.">
DA, SOLDAT?

WUNNK

(GAS!)

(WEAPONS HOLD! IT COULD BE INCENDIARY!)

(CAPTAIN...?)

BOZHE MOY...

RRNG
RRNG
RRNG
OPENING.
THE ARMOR...
SURRENDER IT!
FIRE!
AKKAKKAKKAKKAKK

VZZZZNNN

VZZZZNNN

VZZZZNNN

AAIGH 0100100D

GET DOWN.

SPLUNCH

IT SHOULD'VE ENGAGED.. US ALREADY.
WE GET A.. WRONG LOCATION?
QUARTZ. LOOK.
FALSE TARGETS. ABSENT SENTIENCE.
EMPTY... SHELLS.
STREAMING TO PRIMARY.
CONTAINMENT COMPROMISED.
TO BE CONTINUED IN ARMOR HUNTERS #1!

GREEN GODDESS

The mid-'90s Garth Ennis miniseries *Goddess* is a blackly comic, occasionally lyrical thrill-ride, discovers **Matt Bielby**

Garth Ennis's Vertigo miniseries from 1995 is a fast-paced, wildly overcooked picaresque romp, in which virtually everyone (main girl Rosie Nolan a notable exception) is some kind of horrible, self-regarding psychopath.

It all kicks off when regular Irish lass Rosie – a London zookeeper, all girl-next-door lovability, intricate red curls and unlikely Doctor Doolittle qualities – finds herself manifesting incredible but uncontrollable telekinesis. Soon she's accidentally tearing Scotland from the rest of the UK and pushing it out into the North Sea, achieving in seconds what Alex Salmond could only dream of, and attracting unwanted attention of the worst sort.

Soon our girl's on the run, pursued by misanthropic CIA agent Harry Hooks and, close behind, the equally dangerous Constable Dixon, a mentalist British policeman with revenge in mind. Dixon's accompanied throughout by a pair of memorably pug-ugly henchmen, the "Butcher Bruvvers" – imagine a particularly brutal Tweedledum and Tweedledee, by way of *EastEnders'* Mitchell clan – who epitomise the level that much of *Goddess* works at: gleefully violent, vaguely satirical, scattergun in terms of target. American arrogance, environmentalist hypocrisy, police brutality and general human dickishness all get it in the neck – typical Ennis, you might say, but it has a subtly different flavour.

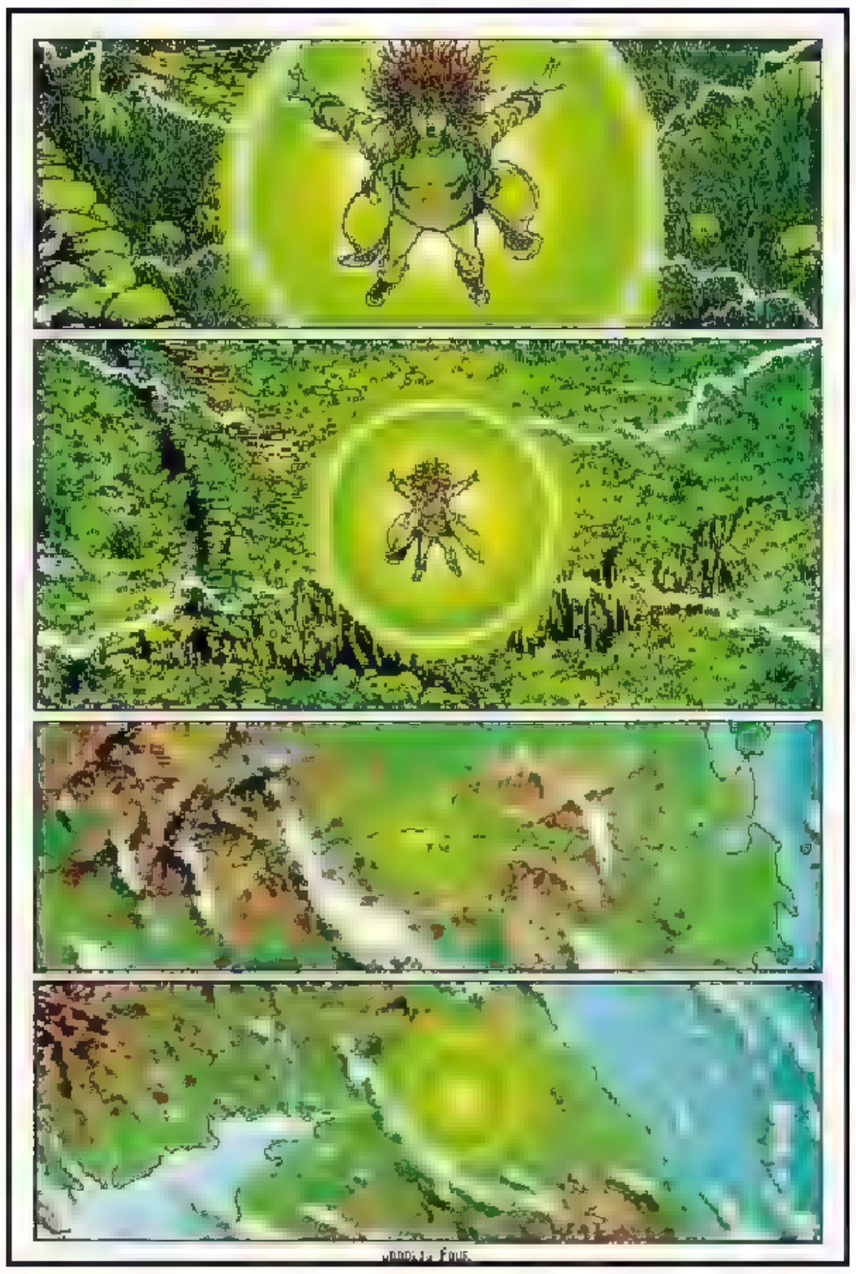
Indeed, there's something of a Euro-influenced Pat Mills feel to *Goddess* – think *Sláine, Finn, Third World War* – that's noticeably different to the pure Americana of much of Ennis's later work. It feels like a strip that could have run in *Crisis* – the politically charged *2000 AD* spin-off – though it was actually, apparently, originally developed for Disney's abortive Touchstone adult comic imprint. DC picked it up just as Ennis's *Preacher* star was on the rise.

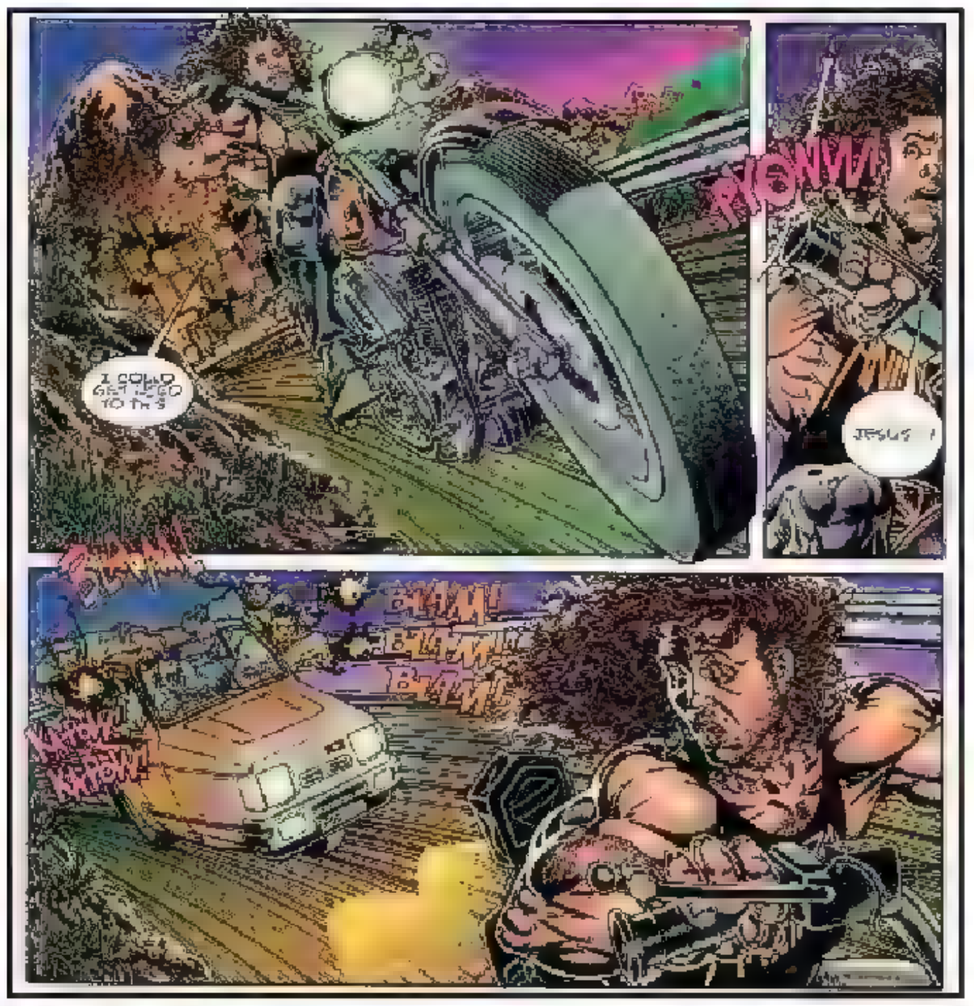
As things get increasingly out of hand, Rosie gathers an oddball bunch of companions at her side: *Goddess*'s whiny tagalong narrator, Jeff; a homicidally over-committed biker-cum-ecoterrorist called Mudhawk; and Mud's permanently pissed off ex-girlfriend, Sam. By the time we get to the Arctic circle – for most of the story is one big global chase, glorying in some of the most spectacular landscapes in comics – we've seen fighter planes crash and bodies in space, buildings teleported to the North Pole and ships dropped from the sky, as well as all manner of dangerous beasts, from sharks to polar bears. Death is everywhere, with heads exploding and bullets tearing through splattered flesh numerous times per issue.

It's lively, then, but there are problems. Rosie herself swims in and out of focus; Ennis often seems more enamoured with his cast of crazy killers than the mysticism lurking in the background; and, far too often, our heroes seem almost as bad as the mentalists chasing them – yes, Mudhawk, we're looking at you. The 11th hour switch to Wiccan-style New Age paganism – in which Rosie is revealed to be a "Goddess", one of eight planetary deities with Earth's best interests at heart – sits kinda uneasily with all the shattered kneecaps and tiger maulings that came before.

RED, DEAD, REDEMPTION

Responsible for much of the joy of *Goddess* is artist Phil Winslade – a bearded, long-haired Brit who looked like a minor member of his own cast, and who's since enjoyed runs on *Howard The Duck, The Flash* and others. Here he was doing his very first professional work, the eight issues of *Goddess* apparently





taking him three years to draw – easily believable, when you consider the obsessive, almost autistic level of detail he brings to everything.

Why he isn't a bigger star is something of a mystery, for Winslade knocks it out of the park with his energy, commitment to kitchen-sink realism, and strong (if occasionally over-egged) facial expressions. Yes, the figure work can be perhaps a little off at times, but the watercolours-over-inks look suits the story perfectly, and you can feel the love he's poured into every page. It's fun watching Winslade get better and better as the miniseries progresses too, and great to see a guy who's actually observed what he's drawing for once in comics: you can count the spokes on his bicycle wheels and the hairs on each character's head, his cars are all recognisable makes and models, the humdrum realism of his buildings spot-on.

And his countryside is transcendentally, awe-inspiringly great.

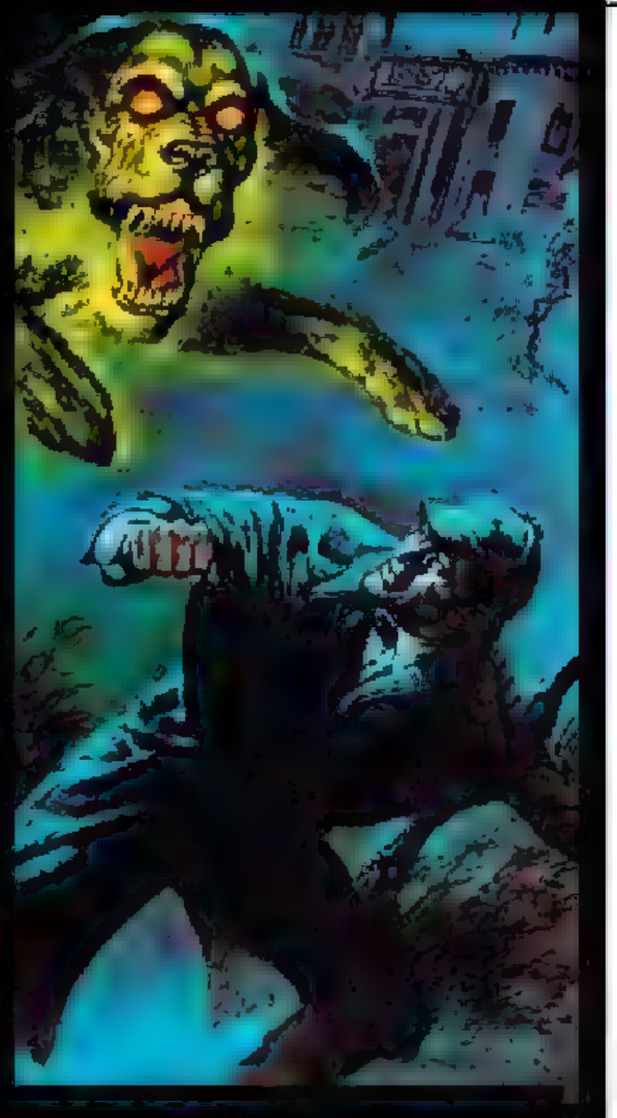
Then, when Rosie's magical powers really manifest, we get an Art Nouveau style – kinda Alphonse Mucha, with intricate illuminated borders and sharp outlines – which works brilliantly.

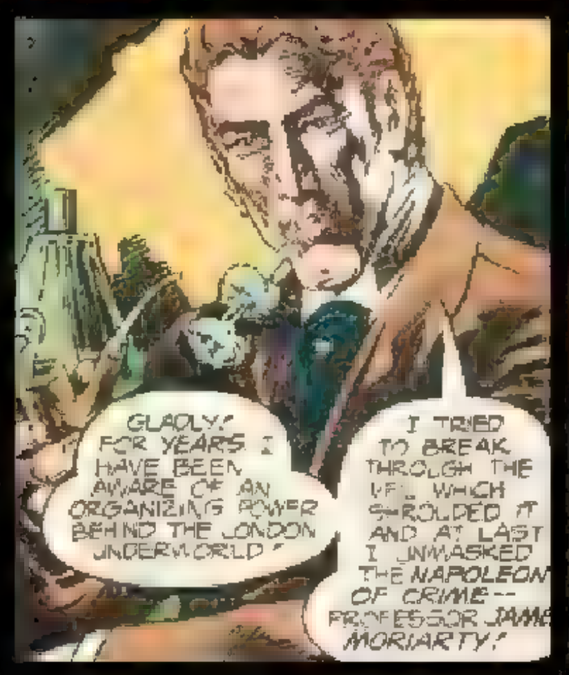
In 1996 Ennis had one of his many Eisner Award Best Writer nominations for the double-whammy of this and *Preacher*, and *Goddess* in many ways feels like a dry-run for that more famous, ambitious companion title. The strong gags, the sharp dialogue, and the sudden swerves from violent, somewhat self-indulgent farce to political anger and beer-fuelled sentimentality are certainly all present and correct here, and the basic structures of both are remarkably similar too.

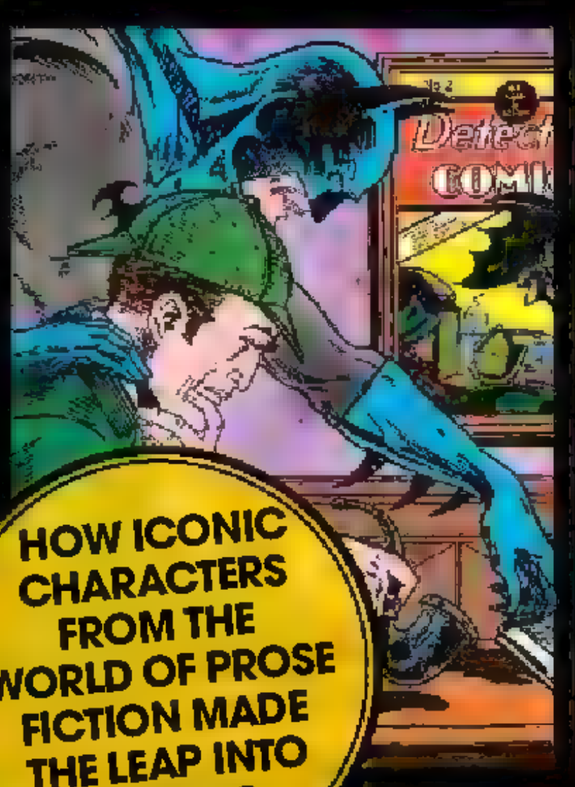
A flawed gem, then. *Goddess* might've been better if Ennis had scaled back on the gross-out humour and random skewerings, and perhaps concentrated more on Rosie and her predicament. More subtlety to the eco message wouldn't have hurt either. But it reads well – and looks amazing. Best of all, after a slow-ish start *Goddess* really ramps up the tension and intrigue in the later issues, building to a properly exciting, and touching, climax rather than trailing off weakly, as so many comics do.

Above: It's easy to see why it took Winslade three years to draw: the detail on both covers and internal panels – whether it's a shark or the Rio skyline – is incredible

It's still possible to track down the graphic novel collection, if you look hard enough...




GLADLY! FOR YEARS I HAVE BEEN AWARE OF AN ORGANIZING POWER BEHIND THE LONDON UNDERWORLD!
I TRIED TO BREAK THROUGH THE VEIL WHICH SHROUDED IT AND AT LAST I UNMASKED THE NAPOLEON OF CRIME -- PROFESSOR JAMES MORIARTY!



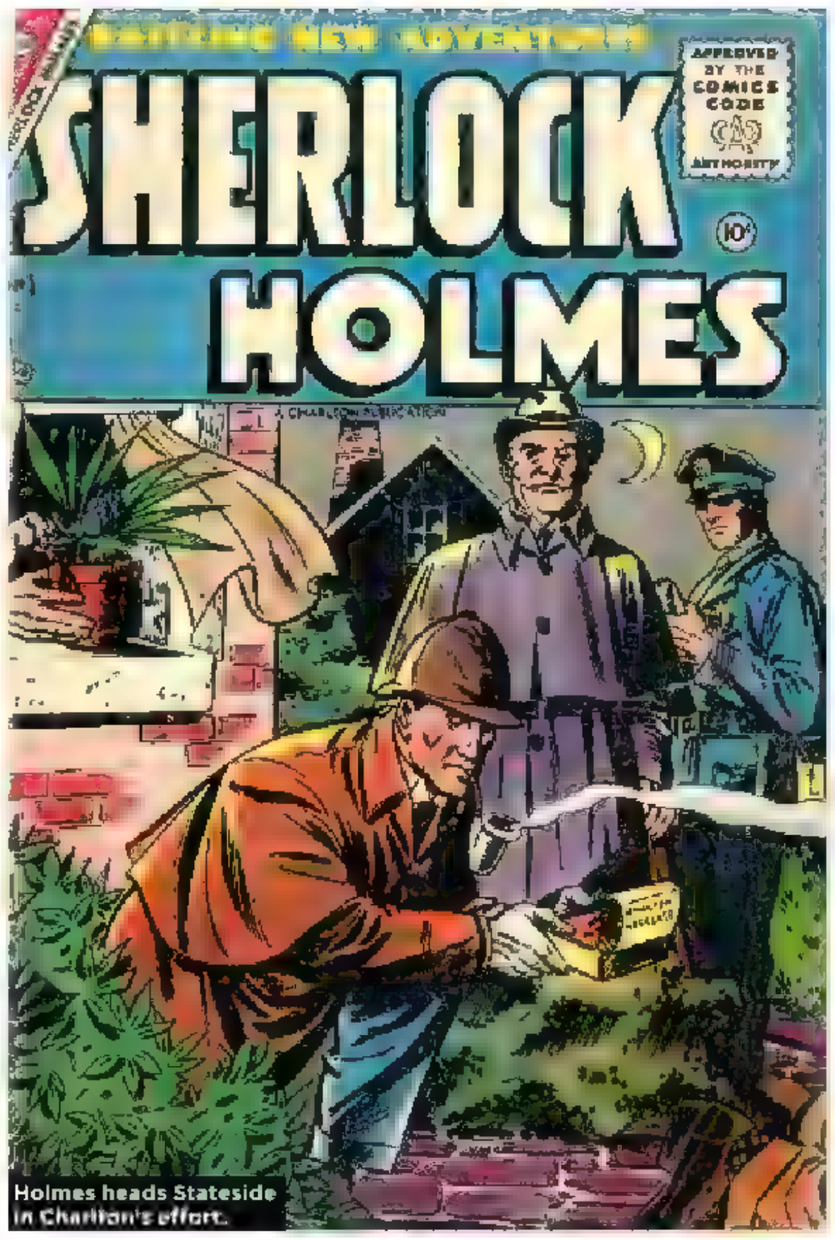
SHERLOCK HOLMES

In the second instalment **James Lovegrove** turns his attention to the world's greatest detective who isn't Batman

MEET THE PROSES #2

COMIC HEROES

It was Sidney Paget who gave the sleuth his deerstalker.



Holmes heads Stateside in Charlton's effort.

Who's the most famous and popular character in literature? Elementary, my dear reader. It's Sherlock Holmes, consulting detective, resident of 221B Baker Street, arch-Victorian and all-round ultra-egghead sleuth.

Holmes and his stalwart sidekick Dr Watson originally appeared in four novels and 56 short stories penned by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle between 1887 and 1927. Since then there have been an estimated 2,000 pastiche tales by diverse hands. Authors who have tackled Holmes include such luminaries as Stephen King, Neil Gaiman, Anthony Horowitz, Michael Chabon, Colin Dexter and Michael Moorcock. There have also been numerous Holmes movies, TV shows and stage plays.

Naturally, comics have got in on the act. So let us take out our magnifying glasses and examine the evidence to see which are blameless and which are criminal.

NEWSPAPER STRIPS

The earliest proper Sherlock Holmes comic is the 1950s newspaper strip written by Edith Meiser and drawn primarily by Frank Giacoia (later to become a Marvel mainstay as one of its premier inkers). These are very straight, slightly plodding versions of original tales such as "A Scandal In Bohemia" and "The Red-Headed League", in which Giacoia opts for the standard image of Holmes with pipe, cape and deerstalker hat. The deerstalker, incidentally, is never explicitly mentioned in the canon – Doyle refers to an "ear-flapped travelling cap" on just one occasion – but was a visual feature added by Sidney Paget, who illustrated the tales when they first appeared in *The Strand Magazine*. It has since come to typify Holmes and, as we shall see, most of the comic-book representations of the character.

In the mid-'50s Charlton Comics produced a couple of issues of *All-New Baffling Adventures Of Sherlock Holmes*. Being Charlton product, these are as pedestrian as you would expect and the only "baffling" thing about them is that the setting is contemporary America rather than Victorian England. The stories, three per issue, do not draw on Doyle's plots in any way. The comic, however, was unauthorised and it is said that legal pressure from the Doyle estate forced it to be cancelled.

The deerstalker is present and correct in that title, as it is also in the single issue of *New Adventures Of Sherlock Holmes* published by Dell in 1960. This contains two stories, neither spectacular. "The Deadly Inheritance" sees Holmes attending a séance to settle a dispute between two brothers, while in "The Tunnel Scheme" Professor Moriarty has concocted a bank robbery that exploits an under-construction Channel tunnel. There's quite a bit of action and gunplay, but precious little logic or fidelity to the source material.

In the late '60s the British children's weekly *Look And Learn* included serialised strip versions of *The Sign Of Four* and *The Hound Of The Baskervilles*. These appeared two pages at a time and are unusual in that they employ speech bubbles when the customary format for this kind of feature was illustrations with chunks of text narrative. The adaptations omit certain aspects of Doyle's plots: there's no romance between Dr Watson and Mary Morstan (the future Mrs Watson) in *Four*, and

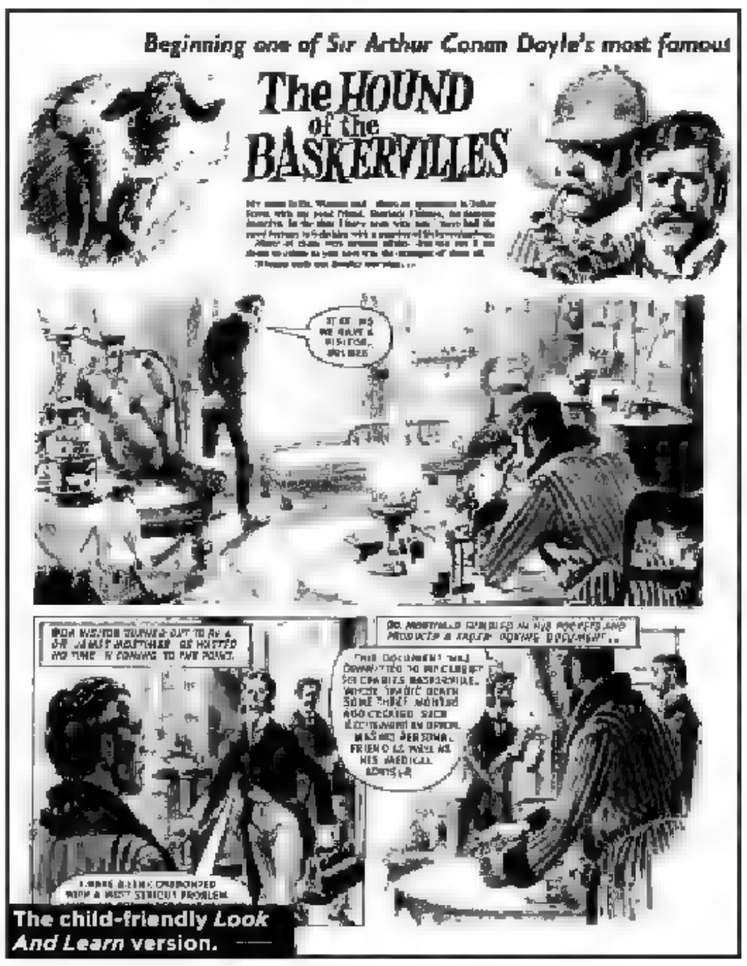
> **"The deerstalker is never explicitly mentioned in the canon"**

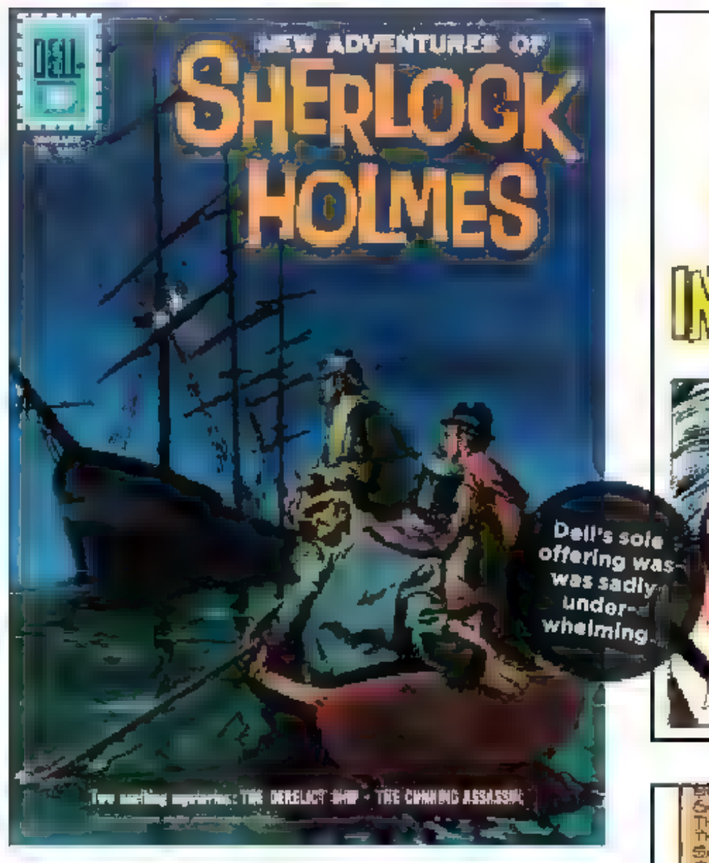
The shortlived newspaper strip.

In *Baskervilles* several of the supporting characters are absent, making the identity of the killer that much less opaque. But Robert Forrest's luscious monochrome watercolour illustration, the presence of the dread deerstalker notwithstanding, put these among the very top tier of Holmes comics.

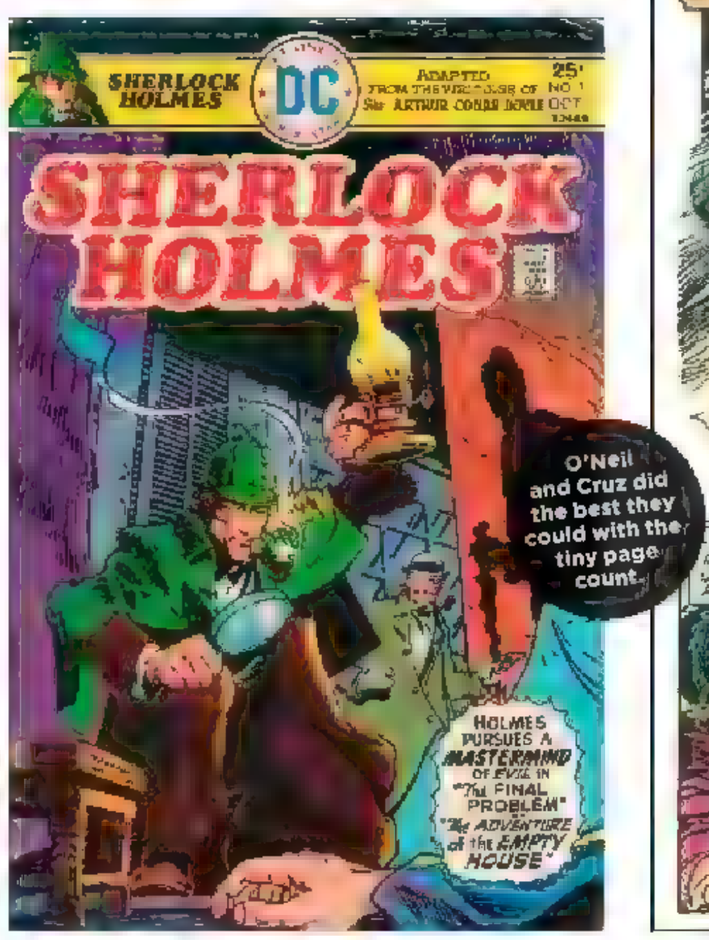
In DC's one-off *Sherlock Holmes* (1975), noted *Batman* scribe Dennis O'Neil adapts "The Final Problem" and "The Adventure Of The Empty House", the two stories which bookend Holmes's supposed death and his subsequent three-year absence from London which Sherlockians have dubbed the "Great Hiatus". O'Neil crams as much fisticuffs and swordplay into 18 pages as he can. The result is a Holmes who's more of a pulp-fiction superman than a cerebral detective. ER Cruz illustrates in a classic, fluid style. Deerstalker and pipe? Oh yes.

A year later Marvel produced its own adaptation of *The Hound Of The Baskervilles* across two issues of black-and-white magazine-sized anthology title *Marvel Preview*. Doug Moench does sterling work with the script, hewing close to Doyle's text, complemented


Beginning one of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's most famous
The HOUND of the BASKERVILLES
The child-friendly *Look And Learn* version.



SHERLOCK HOLMES
The DEADLY INHERITANCE
221B BAKER STREET STOP HERE DRIVER THIS IS WHERE I'LL FIND SHERLOCK HOLMES!
YOU HAVE LATE CALLERS, HOLMES, AND STRANGE ONES AT THAT! THERE'S A GENTLE MAN AND A GYPSY COMING HERE
A GYPSY WATSON? THEN COUNT ON THE MATTER INVOLVING SOMETHING SUPPOSEDLY SUPER-NATURAL!


SHERLOCK HOLMES
DC
ADAPTED FROM THE WRITINGS OF Sir ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE
25¢
NO 1
OCT
SHERLOCK HOLMES
HOLMES PURSUES A MASTERMIND OF EVIL IN "The FINAL PROBLEM" "The ADVENTURE of the EMPTY HOUSE"
O'Neil and Cruz did the best they could with their tiny page count.

SOON FROM HIS GARMENTS AND MATCHES THE CAB VANISH INTO THE GLOOM. A GRIM SMILE PLAYS ON HIS THIN LIPS.
ALMOST IMMEDIATELY, FURTHER DANGER PRESENTS ITSELF FOR A TRICK-EE MAN BEARING A DEADLY WEAPON SPRINGS FROM THE DARKNESS
THE CLUB CLEAVES NOTHING MORE THAN THE MOIST AIR--
AND THE INTENDED VICTIM ASSUMES A BOXER'S STANCE AND SNAPS A LIGHTNING LEFT PUNCH INTO HIS ATTACKER'S ASTONISHED FACE.
THIS IS FOLLOWED BY A CRUSHING RIGHT AS HARD AS GRANITE.

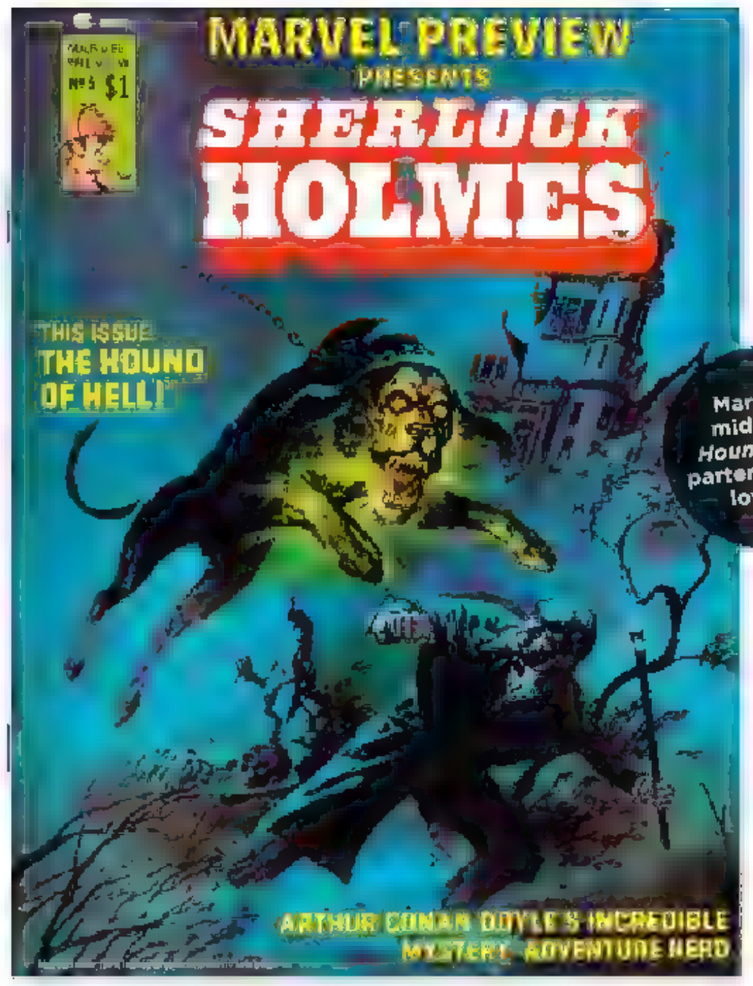
by Val Mayerik's nicely gnarly line-and-wash art. The deerstalker crops up only near the end, when Holmes is on Dartmoor, and one could argue that that is at least appropriate, since it is traditionally a countryman's outdoor hat.

GOING PUBLIC

Copyright on Sherlock Holmes expired in 1980 and the character fell into the public domain (although a recent US court case has determined that certain narrative elements in the final 10 stories, such as Watson's second wife and his love of rugby, remain the property of the Doyle estate for the time being). This opened the floodgates for a plethora of new Holmes adventures.

Fifteen issues of *Cases Of Sherlock Holmes* from Renegade Comics – and a further nine from Northstar Comics, who carried on the series under various titles – came out between 1986 and 1992 and contain the texts of the original stories slotted around beautiful, hyper-detailed illustrations by Dan Day. Holmes here looks very much like Basil Rathbone, the actor who played him so memorably in the Universal Studios movie series from the '30s and '40s, and somewhat like Peter Cushing as well, who also portrayed the character many times onscreen. For the pictures alone, these mid-'80s comics are worth checking out.

The same, alas, cannot be said for a brace of miniseries published by Malibu Graphics in the early '90s. *Scarlet In Gaslight* finds Holmes facing Count Dracula, a literary mash-up that had by then already featured in prose novels by Fred Saberhagen, Loren D Estleman and David Stuart Davies, to name but three. *A Case Of Blind Fear* sees the detective clash with HG Wells's mad, murderous Invisible Man, and is distinguished by some truly terrible cod-Victorian dialogue from writer Martin Powell. Someone refers to a "chemist shoppe",

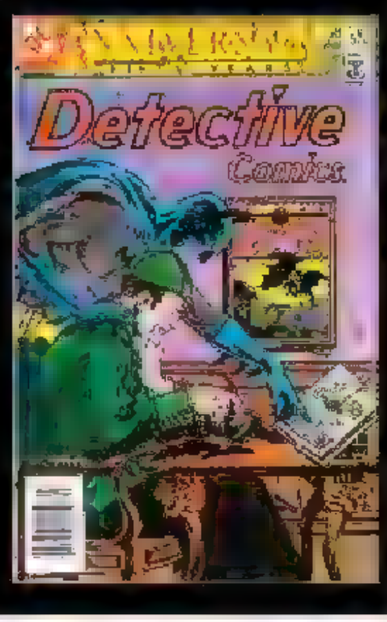


Marvel's mid-'70s *Hound* two-parter looked lovely.

HOLMES VS THE JOKER?

Everyone knows that Sherlock Holmes appeared in *Detective Comics* #572 in 1987, an anniversary celebration issue commemorating 50 years of Batman, which happened to coincide with Holmes's own centennial. One segment of the story takes place in the Victorian era, where Holmes and Watson uncover a conspiracy masterminded by Professor Moriarty which has ramifications in the present day for Batman and fellow DC universe sleuths Slam Bradley and Ralph Dibny, aka the Elongated Man.

Did you also know, though, that Holmes clashed with Batman's nemesis the Joker in issue #6 of the Clown Prince of Crime's own shortlived mid-'70s solo title? Well, no, he didn't, not really. In fact, it's a stage actor playing Holmes who, having received a knock on the head from the Joker, deludedly believes he is the genuine article. Dennis O'Neil's capersome story is littered with sly, punning Holmesian references.



He's got Cushing's nose and Rathbone's eyes.

Dodgy drugs and even dodgier storylines.

"A Case Of Dodgy Dialogue", more like.

someone else calls a telegram a "telly", and a Hansom driver is seen muttering "Blaggart stoled me cab...". Seppo Makinen's art is similarly gauche and amateurish.

These two creators take a further crack at the character in *Sherlock Holmes: Return Of The Devil*, a two-issue microseries published by Adventure Comics in 1992 which pits Holmes against Aleister Crowley and Professor Moriarty's vengeful brother (the latter of whom Doyle carelessly failed ever to mention). A plot involving doctored cocaine provides an excuse for countless hallucinatory dream sequences, in one of which Holmes is seen making mad passionate love to his "wife" Irene Adler. As with *Blind Fear*, there's an uncomfortable level of female nudity and implied rape.

The Curious Case Of The Vanishing Villain by Gordon Rennie and Woodrow Phoenix (Tundra, 1993) is not another Invisible Man tale as you might think, but instead brings Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde into the mix. This elegant, metafictional tale sees Holmes on the trail of the monstrous Hyde, who has left the pages of his own book to rampage through other literary works, including those of Edgar Allan Poe.

Yet more mash-up malarkey appears in Caliber's *The Adventure Of The Opera Ghost* (1994), an ambitious affair written by Steven P Jones and featuring characters from Gaston Leroux's *The Phantom Of The Opera*. Aldin Baroza draws in a freeform, scratchy style that seems to be deliberately aping Eddie Campbell's work on *From Hell*. Without Campbell's skill, however, not to mention an Alan Moore script, the results are underwhelming.

The Sussex Vampire, a 1996 one-shot also from Caliber, ought to be more entertaining than it is. Adapting one of Doyle's more Gothic Holmes yarns, writer Warren Ellis is let down by Craig Gilmore, whose art is sloppy and inconsistent, sometimes relying on photo reference, other times going for a spiky Dave-McKean-esque looseness. Ellis himself doesn't do too badly until the final page where, when the villain's father prescribes a year in the navy as the remedy for his young son's misdeeds, he inserts an incongruous caption about "rum, sodomy and the lash" that speaks of his own authorial viewpoint rather than Doyle's.

AUTHENTIC

Since the turn of the century, the deerstalker has been blessedly absent from Sherlock Holmes comics and there's a much greater sophistication in creators' approaches to the character. Recently Ian Edginton has penned an excellent series of Holmes graphic novels for SelfMadeHero, in tandem with INJ Culbard. These versions of the four core novels – *A*

KNOWLEDGE OF LITERATURE – NIL.
KNOWLEDGE OF PHILOSOPHY – NIL.
KNOWLEDGE OF ASTRONOMY – NIL.
KNOWLEDGE OF POLITICS – FEEBLE.
KNOWLEDGE OF BOTANY – VARIABLE. WELL UP IN BELLADONNA, OPIUM, AND POISONS GENERALLY. KNOWS NOTHING OF PRACTICAL GARDENING.
KNOWLEDGE OF GEOLOGY – PRACTICAL, BUT LIMITED. TELLS AT A GLANCE DIFFERENT SOILS FROM EACH OTHER. AFTER WALKS HAS SHOWN ME SPLASHES UPON HIS TROUSERS, AND TOLD ME BY THEIR COLOUR AND CONSISTENCE IN WHAT PART OF LONDON HE HAD RECEIVED THEM.
Ian Edginton's Holmes is just as he should be.

Study In Scarlet, *The Sign Of Four*, *The Valley Of Fear* and *The Hound Of The Baskervilles* – are everything a Sherlockian could ask for: dark, stately and authentic.

Edginton has also given us two miniseries of *Victorian Undead* for Wildstorm, starring Holmes. In the first, the detective – deerstalker-free – grapples with a zombie plague which is tied neatly to the infamous Broad Street cholera outbreak of 1854. In the second, Jekyll and Hyde show up, as does Dracula. We may have seen Holmes meet these characters elsewhere before, but Edginton and artists Davide Fabbri and Horacio Domingues handle the crossovers with vigour and originality.

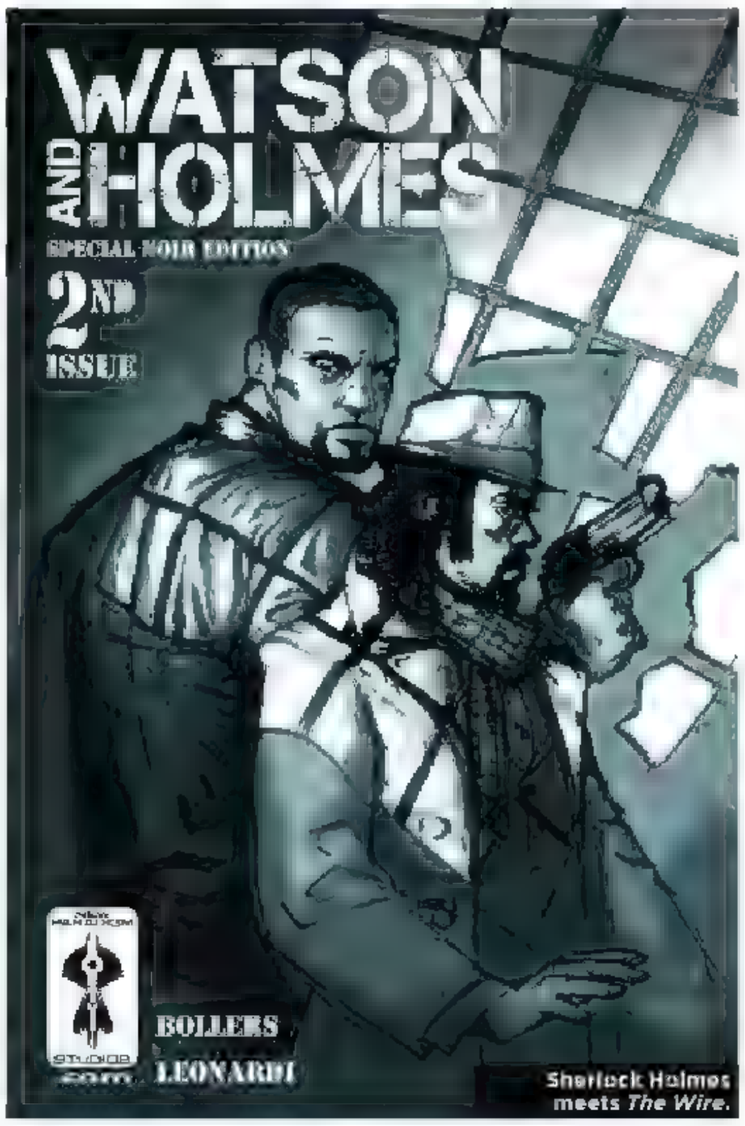
Husband-and-wife writing team Leah Moore and John Reppion have taken a creditable back-to-basics approach to Holmes with their *The Trial Of Sherlock Holmes* and *The Liverpool Demon* for Dynamite Entertainment. The former sees Holmes accused of a murder which naturally he did not commit, while the latter delves into a seedy, supernatural world of monsters and ancient artefacts. Both are worth a look, unlike *Sherlock Holmes: Year One*, also from Dynamite. This is partly a retelling of Doyle's "The Adventure Of The Gloria Scott" interlaced with the kind of serial-killer-committing-murders-according-to-an-elaborate-pattern plot that has become bog-standard thanks to movies such as *Theatre Of Blood*, *The Abominable Doctor Phibes* and *Se7en*. Writer Scott Beatty brings nothing new to the table. Holmes here does little detecting, and the solution to the killings more or less falls into his lap. Worse is Beatty's cackhanded grasp of British vernacular. "Bugger all!" is not an oath, it's a noun, and a line like, "Cease this violence or I shall parse my own!" may sound posh but makes no sense whatsoever.

Even Bats is wowed by Sherlock.

Sherlock Holmes And The Vampires Of London is a French bande dessinée just published in English by Dark Horse. Yet again Holmes is confronted by bloodsucking undead, but Sylvain Cordurié's script shows respect to the canon – it takes place just after Holmes's presumed demise at the Reichenbach Falls, so the detective himself is technically "living dead" – and Laci's artwork is very stylish indeed.

CURRENT TRENDS

TV dramas such as *Sherlock* and *Elementary* have shown how Holmes can be successfully updated into a modern context, and the current comics series *Watson And Holmes* (New Paradigm Studios) puts another interesting contemporary spin on the character.



Sherlock Holmes meets *The Wire*.

The first miniseries, *A Study In Black*, has just been collected as a trade paperback. Here both the principal characters are African-Americans: Watson an ER doctor and a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, Holmes a dreadlocked private investigator and tech whiz who makes his home in an apartment in 221 Baker Street in Harlem, New York. It sounds terrible but, brought to life by writer Karl Bollers and artist Rick Leonardi, it's actually superb – a streetwise Sherlock Holmes for the digital age.

The recent flurry of Holmes comics proves there's life in the great detective yet, even after nearly 130 years. The deerstalker has been consigned to the dustbin but the game is still very much afoot.

NEXT TIME: Pulp fiction superman Doc Savage.

MUPPET SHERLOCK HOLMES

Seriously, this 2010 four-issue miniseries from Boom! Studios' Boom Kids! imprint is one of the most absurdly faithful Holmes adaptations around. The Great Gonzo is the great detective; Fozzie Bear is Dr Watson; Kermit is Inspector Lestrade; Miss Piggy is Irene Adler, "Miss" Hudson, and various other female characters; and further members of the Muppet cast fill out the supporting roles.

Each story riffs on a classic Holmes tale, keeping the basic plot but adding all those things Doyle himself somehow neglected to include, such as jokes, slapstick, sight gags and bathos. Not to mention, in "The Red-Headed League", bad ginger wigs.

As always with the Muppets, respect and irreverence go hand-in-hand – or should that be hand-in-felt-puppet?

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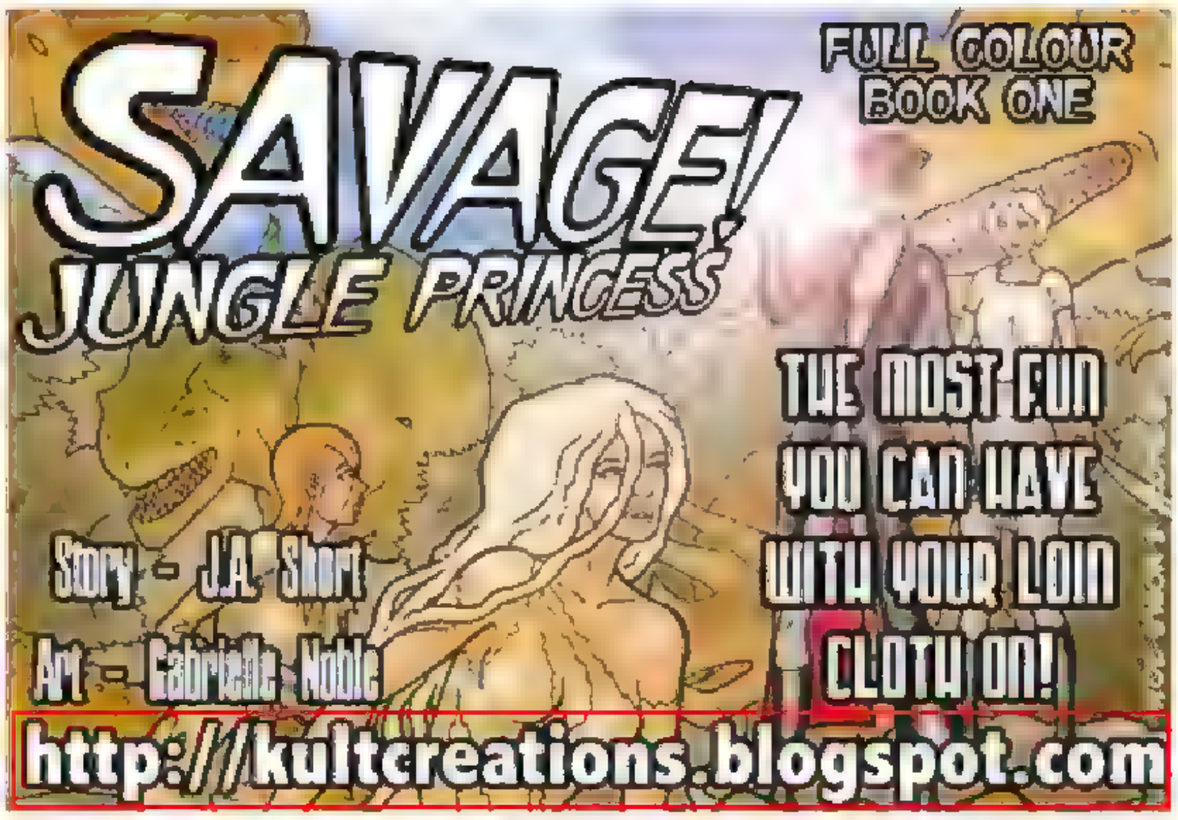

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TOAD MEN.
TOAD MEN?
WHAT...??
I THOUGHT THE COVER WAS JUST A GAG!
I WAS ALL SET FOR THE KREE OR THE SKRULLS...
OR EVEN THE CRUMMY KYLOREANS!
BUT YOU STICK US WITH THE TOAD MEN??

MARVEL
THE SENSATIONAL
SHE-HULK
BOY! COUSIN BRUCE SURE HAD TO PUT UP WITH A TRUCKLOAD OF WEIRDOS IN HIS SECOND ISSUE!
THE INCREDIBLE HULK
TOAD MEN!

THE SENSATIONAL SHE-HULK #02 | **STORY** "ATTACK OF THE TERRIBLE TOAD MEN" | **BY** John Byrne
DATE June 1989

"Boy! Cousin Bruce sure had to put up with a truckload of weirdos in his second issue!"

By James Lovegrove

John Byrne loves She-Hulk. He installed her in the Fantastic Four as a temporary replacement for the Thing during his acclaimed run on that title. He then produced a 1985 Marvel graphic novel starring her, in which she is exposed to radiation from the atomic pile of a crashed S.H.I.E.L.D helicarrier with the result that she becomes She-Hulk permanently, no longer able to revert to her Jennifer Walters form. Brilliantly, she has no problem with this; turns out that she prefers being "Shulkie" anyway.

Under Byrne's aegis, She-Hulk became that rare Marvel character, one with no hang-ups about being a superhero. Freakishly tall, green-skinned and immensely strong, she happily accepts what she is, indeed revels in it. She's smart, too, having long since shed her original "Savage She-Hulk" persona. All this makes her very appealing, sexy even. Her buxom Amazonian figure doesn't hurt, either.

When Byrne was given a crack at a She-Hulk solo title in 1989, he brought even more to the table than just a character he had nurtured and developed. He brought a sense of mischief and a willingness to poke fun at the underlying absurdities of the Marvel universe. Issue #1 is relatively straightforward, a more or less vanilla scene-setter. Only on the penultimate page do we get a hint of what's to come, as She-Hulk muses: "Some anonymous bad guy is ready to spend three million bucks to find out how tough I am... and I know how these things work! It'll be at least my third issue before I find out who it is!" Then, in the next panel, she turns to look directly at us and says, "Although my readers will probably find out on the next page..." (Which we do. It's the Headmen.)

The fourth wall begins to crumble. With issue #2 it has broken down completely, and *Sensational She-Hulk* confidently hits its stride. The baddies this time are the Toad Men from outer space. There's a nice symmetry here, as they were also the villains in *Incredible Hulk* #2, where they kidnapped Bruce Banner in an effort to determine the human race's level of technological advancement. In *She-Hulk* #2 these stunted, warty, amphibian-looking aliens are played for laughs, as well they should be. They aren't even genuine extraterrestrials but, it transpires, dwarves in costume, part of a complex illusion concocted by Mysterio in order to take She-Hulk captive.

As the Toad Men launch their attack on her, She-Hulk turns round in indignation to lambast her creator: "Toad Men, Byrne?? Toad Men? I thought the cover was just a gag. I was all set for the Kree or the Skrulls... or even the crummy Kyloreans! But you stick me with the Toad Men?"

This comes at the end of a running gag in the narrative captions consisting of notes purportedly passed between editor-in-chief Tom DeFalco and title editor Bobbie Chase. The former complains about the lack of action and Marvel "magnificence" in the opening scenes, while the latter repeatedly reassures him that "cosmic grandeur" is on its way. When at last a host of Toad Men spaceships appears, filling the sky in a double-page spread, DeFalco responds laconically with "Not bad, not bad. But I could've used a few more Toad ships." Byrne himself then intervenes: "Well, take a good look at the ones you got, boss! I'm not drawing this [scribbled-out word] fleet again!"

Of course this is all part of the script, Byrne gently joshing. But it's genuinely funny and introduces an element of Harvey Kurtzman's *Mad* into the proceedings, a wry self-consciousness. Later issues would feature Shulkie crossing panel borders in order to get from one location to another; wearing a flimsy silk chemise that doesn't, as you might expect, get ripped to shreds in battle because it has a Comics Code Authority label sewn into it; and tearing through the page, bypassing an advert and emerging through the following page.

It was all lovely metafictional fun and games for eight issues until Byrne either quit or was fired – opinions vary – after complaining about what he regarded as editorial interference. He returned to the book later for a second stab that was possibly more inventive than the first but at the same time somehow less playful.

Dumb villains and a heightened sense of the ridiculous made issue #2 and the rest of Byrne's run a treat. If Monty Python or *The Naked Gun* team were ever to produce a superhero comic, it might look something like this. CH

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